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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 490. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 21ST, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY J. ARTHUR BARSON.

No. 490.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending May 21st, 1898.

The Flawed Amethyst.

NEIL BOYD had been telling tiger stories, and Willie Adams was half through with a yarn concerning a snake that lived in the colonel's compound at Durrumtollah, Sir George, who had shot tigers himself and heard the snake story before ever Adams had landed at the Apollo Bunder, was reading the *Globe*. A sudden and somewhat forcible exclamation from the Baronet interrupted the snake story, and drew upon Sir George the attention of every pair of eyes in the room.

"Anything fresh, George?" inquired Hamilton Graham, Sir George's brother. "Any news of Richards?"

Captain Richards, R.E., an old college mate of the Grahams, had gone on a surveying expedition into the country beyond the Jelum; and, not having returned when expected, many were the rumours concerning him.

"Not a word, Hamilton. But Jimmy's a lucky dog—always was since I knew him. He'll come out right, you'll see, when all's over. No, nothing about Richards. Pinaud's was broken into on Monday night, and the manager shot while attempting to prevent the thieves from getting possession of the keys of the safe."

"Pinaud's?"

"Yes, Pinaud's!—the big jewellers in the Rue de la Paix. Why 'twas only on Saturday that I showed you in their window the amethyst which a dozen years ago I bought from a Hindoo fakir in the fruit market at Singapore."

"Anything extraordinary about that?" queried Boyd, when Hamilton remained silent.

"About what?" asked Sir George.

"The burglary."

"Yes, I think so," returned the Baronet drily, "and p'raps you'll think the same, Neil, when you've heard the story."

"Tell us the tale then, old chap, if it's like that," said Boyd, settling himself down for a smoke; and Sir George, who preferred pig-sticking to story-telling, and would rather ride ten miles any day to shoot a tiger than sit down quietly for ten minutes to tell how it was done, didn't wait for pressing, but actually started at once.

"A dozen years back," he began, "I was spending a few weeks in Singapore. You know the sort of crowd one meets there—Malays, Javanese, Jews, Turks, Europeans, Japanese, Chinese, Cingalese, Hindoos: halfcastes out of the South, halfcastes out of the East—the most motley medley to be found in any single spot on the broad bosom of this weary old planet,—though I won't say but what in the variety and diversity of its items, the Praya at Hong Kong doesn't run Singapore very close.

"Strolling through the fruit market early one morning, I was accosted by a fakir of the type one sees at the bathing *ghats* in the holy city of Benares. Throwing himself at my feet, he produced from his dirty loin cloth a still dirtier roll of muslin. Unfolding it, he disclosed a thin strip of leather, which before opening I knew would reveal an assortment of gems which he was offering for sale.

"His collection was not very large. A few diamonds cut smooth after the fashion of the Orient, a few sapphires, a pearl or two, half-a-dozen emeralds and three remarkably fine uncut rubies.

"It was the rubies that attracted my notice, and if the price was right I was disposed to purchase.

"Lal Singh named his figure, and from another corner of his scanty waist cloth, producing a second piece of dirty rag, exhibited an amethyst of a size uncommonly large, and of the softest and purest colour. The value and appearance of the stone, however was injured, I thought, by a flaw, which ran obliquely across the face

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of it, giving it a very singular, not to say bizarre appearance.

"The amethyst and the rubies, I found, went in the same parcel. But, while something of a curio, certainly, I had no use for the violet-blue stone, and said so; but the old beggar was obdurate. If I took the rubies, I must take the amethyst; if I declined the amethyst, I couldn't have the rubies. Eventually, I bought the lot, the amethyst being put in at a price that made no difference; and I went off to my hotel satisfied that I had secured a bargain.

"Two days afterwards, my room at the Grand Oriental was entered, and the rubies and a few other articles stolen. But, with a nice appreciation of circumstances, the flawed amethyst was considerately left. The thief I put down as Lal Singh himself; the police, more probably, that he was merely the instigator thereof. Anyway, his dusky person vanished straightway from the bazaars and alleys of Singapore, and was seen by me no more, during my stay at the Straits Settlements.

"On the amethyst I set no particular value but, as that was all I had to show for the money I'd parted with, I sat looking at it rather ruefully the morning after the robbery, wondering why it had been left when the rubies were taken, and considering what use I could possibly turn it to.

"'Were it not for that unsightly-looking "flaw"' thought I, 'the stone itself isn't a bad one—the colour indeed, is the purest and most delicate of violets; and, when it catches the light, the successive waves of colour, as they pass over the surface, produce an effect that would be perfect but for one thing—that sinister-looking flaw.'

"Yes, the longer I looked at the stone, the more convinced did I become that the flaw on the face of it had an appearance that was decidedly sinister. I hadn't observed it before, but now, as I sat with the thing in my hand and gazed into it, I seemed to see another face grinning back at me through the cleavage of the fracture. Yes, there it was—and the longer I looked the clearer I saw it. Not a human face; no, the face of one of the thirty-three million gods of Hindoostan. But the features varied continually. Now it was Siva the Destroyer, now it was Ganesha, now Hanuman the monkey-god. It was uncanny.

"I admit to a strong strain of Highland blood in the Grahams; but we draw the line at spells, charms and amulets. I put down the stone and took a few turns across the room stopping for a minute before the window; then, coming back to the table I picked up the amethyst again. As I expected, I saw nothing but the long, ugly-looking flaw. For a moment I had fancied that by some piece of diabolical cunning a clever artificer had evolved the likeness of some idol-face out of the lines at the base of the fracture. But no—the face had been evolved by some strange freak of my own imagination.

"I examined the stone closely. There was a queer, 'creepy' sort of a look about the flaw; but I no longer saw any resemblance to a face—human or animal. I was dismissing the matter as a vision of the mind, a mental picture called up by some fantastical arrangement of lines and curves, as the light fell upon the different facets, when a noise in the street below attracted my attention, and I walked to the window, the stone still in my hand.

"A procession was passing. After the last man had gone by, I opened my hand and took another look at the stone. There was Hanuman the monkey-god, grinning at me as plainly as if I were in his own temple at Benares.

"What did it mean? I rubbed my eyes and looked again. There was nothing but the long transverse line of the flaw—stay! Yes, there was Hanuman again. No, it was Ganesha this time, Ganesha the elephant-headed. I locked away the stone and went out for a walk.

"In the native bazaar I saw a lapidary carving a seal; as it happened, the stone was an amethyst, but the colour was cloudy and the cutting very inferior. I decided that I couldn't do better with my specimen than have it converted into a seal. The flaw would be no hindrance to a clever workman, the stone was unusually large; and the cutting of the design would effectually spoil the features of Messrs. Hanuman, Ganesha & Co., which I had again persuaded myself could only be due to a lively fancy provoked by some singular refraction of light through the cleavage of the flaw.

"Next morning, I took the stone to an expert, a Cingalese who did all the best work in the place, and went off for a day's shooting.

"Before leaving the hotel, I had taken a hasty peep at the flawed stone—just for satisfaction's sake. There was nothing to distinguish it from any similar stone in the same condition; and, laughing at the stupid whimseys which foolish fancy had engendered, I wrapped it up and set out. That was the day the end of my thumb was carried away through a gun accident, while after peafowl; and the first thing I saw on going to my room in the evening was the box containing the flawed amethyst. It had been returned by the jeweller with an excuse quite too elaborate to be genuine. I was the first man in his shop in the morning.

"After much fencing and dodging he told me that the stone was considered to be unlucky—and more than that it was impossible to get out of him.

"Unlucky, was it? Well, certainly I had lost three rubies and the top of my thumb since it came into my possession.

"I went to another lapidary, but before I'd got a hundred yards from his shop, his boy was begging me to return. It was the same story, only more so—lies, excuses, what you will first; and then, the real reason: 'Ver sorree, sahib, but him no lucky. Not for ten tousand rupee, sahib. Him no good stone; no lucky, sahib, no lucky.'

"I put the stone in my pocket, and went to an English cutler's in the town where I had purchases to make. While examining some razors I managed to give myself an ugly gash with the blade. 'That confounded stone,' I muttered, looking at my bandaged thumb. 'My thumb yesterday, my finger to-day; to-morrow, perhaps, my neck.'

"At the first opportunity I stole another look at the stone. The flaw had that queer sort of uncomfortable suggestion about it which I had noticed before; but I could see nothing resembling a face looking out of the stone. Confound the thing! what was the matter with it?

"Next day I walked off to the old lapidary I had seen in the native bazaar; but with a curt shake of his venerable head and a brief 'no, sahib, no,' he returned me the stone.

"There was an English jeweller in Stamford Raffles Street and away I trudged to him. I explained what I wanted done. He examined the stone carefully, spend-

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ing a considerable time over it, while I scrutinised him narrowly. 'Funny stone, isn't it?' he said, putting down the glass he had been using and eyeing me curiously. 'Queer sort of flaw, that. Can't quite make it out.'

"'What's the matter with it?' I asked carelessly.

"'I don't know,' said he, 'but—well, I could have sworn I saw a face look at me out of the stone.'

"'A face?' said I 'what sort of a face?'

"'Well,' he replied, 'I didn't see it again when I looked through the glass; so p'raps it was only fancy.'

"'Must have been,' I said, though his words had nearly brought my heart into my mouth.

"'You can leave it,' he said, 'till to-morrow, and I'll let you know what we can do with it.'

"When I called on the following day, he handed it to me with the observation that not one of his cutters—natives all—would touch it.

"It was bewitched, it was unlucky. It was this, it was that. So the flawed amethyst came back to me.

"I thought I would get Peters, my man, a long-headed, hawk-eyed Lowland Scot, to look at it; and tell me if he saw anything amiss with it.

"'There's something wrong, sir, with that "stone,"' was his verdict, delivered very impressively, as he returned it to me. But what he saw in it I couldn't get him to say, beyond the emphatic utterance of the awesome word—'devils.'

"That night, before locking the stone away—it was my purpose then to bring it to England, where, I told myself, the jewellers would not be so idiotically absurd as to refuse a job on so flimsy a pretext—that night, I forced myself to look at the stone steadily by the light of an Osler reading lamp. At the end of five minutes, the face of Siva began to show—Siva the Destroyer—blurred at first, then clearer and at last quite plain. No sooner, however, had I recognised Siva, than it was the monkey-god, Hanuman, who was mowing and grinning at me.

"The perspiration was standing in great drops upon my forehead, and, forgetting my previous resolution to take the stone home, I flung the thing from me, careless whither it fell; and undressing rapidly, got into bed.

"Some hours after, I was roused by cries of 'Fire!' The room was full of smoke. Half suffocated, I was dragged out, and the flames extinguished by the attendants. The reading lamp was found smashed upon the floor. How it came there, I haven't a notion.

"During the remainder of my stay at Singapore, I left the flawed amethyst religiously alone. Where it had fallen, there it might stay. I made no search after it, or induced any to be made; and when, at the beginning of the following week, I started for Hong Kong, I cherished the hope that, if Peters had come across the crystal in putting my things together for shipment, he had tactfully contrived, with a due regard for prejudice, to leave the unclean thing in the dust of the corner where it lay. He had said nothing to me about it; and I made up my mind I would say nothing to him.

"The run to Hong Kong would have been pleasant enough but for the fear of that stone turning up unexpectedly. It haunted me like a nightmare. When we dropped anchor in Hong Kong harbour, I felt perfectly wretched—all because of that miserable stone. What had become of it? I would have given a pocketfull of sovereigns to know; yet I was too proud to inquire of Peters, and he had never mentioned the 'deil's stane' since the day when he had given his verdict against it.

"I began to wish I had never seen the thing. It was getting on my nerves. I couldn't rid myself of the dread of it.

"I got into the boat that was to take us to the landing wharf, feeling as if a millstone were round my neck; and, looking up at the terraced roads which cut the face of the Peak, wished it was dear old Devon and the long white terraces on Plymouth Hoe.

"I suppose I got up too soon and overbalanced myself; anyway, before I could spring ashore at the wharf, I'd gone over—hat box in one hand and dispatch box in the other. The former fell back into the boat, the latter went under with me and was not recovered till days after. That blessed amethyst had found a lodging in my hat box, when I flung it across the room—the box was standing on the floor with the lid partly off. Peters had never seen it, so he tried to make me believe.

"Well, after that, what do you think? I went straight off to a Chinese dealer to whom I had been directed as a man who would buy the devil's horns if he could make a profit on them; and, after the usual 'haggle,' the stone changed hands. I had no compunction about selling it to friend 'John,' and the price was nothing. But the transaction was peculiar.

"'John' looked hard at the crystal, and, at one time I thought he was going to refuse; but presently, a grim smile overspread his yellow features—I wondered what was the particular idea which had given birth to it—and he agreed to purchase. The transfer however was effected in a manner that struck me as decidedly singular.

"Three joss sticks were produced, round which a priest had wound strips of red paper stamped with a yellow dragon. Three, you know, is the Chinese lucky number. These joss sticks were then handed to me, and it was explained that the sticks would be bought at the price named for the stone, which could be thrown into the scale as a sort of make-weight to the bargain.

"The 'lucky sticks' would subsequently be burnt before the altar of the Earth god.

"Well, that is a dozen years ago now, and I had almost forgotten the incident of the flawed amethyst, when, passing up the Rue de la Paix last Saturday with Hamilton, I saw the identical stone in Pinaud's window. We stopped to look at it. It was the same stone that I sold to Sin How at Hong Kong, twelve years ago, and in exactly the same condition. I had half a mind to go in and make some inquiry about it; but Hamilton dissuaded me. That there is some subtle connection between that unlucky stone and the shooting of Pinaud's manager, I am fully convinced; but how, why and wherefore, it would puzzle Solomon to explain.

"I have told my story," concluded Sir George, after a pause, "if any person feels equal to fording the stream, let him wade in."

But a great silence had fallen upon the room.

H. HUNTER.

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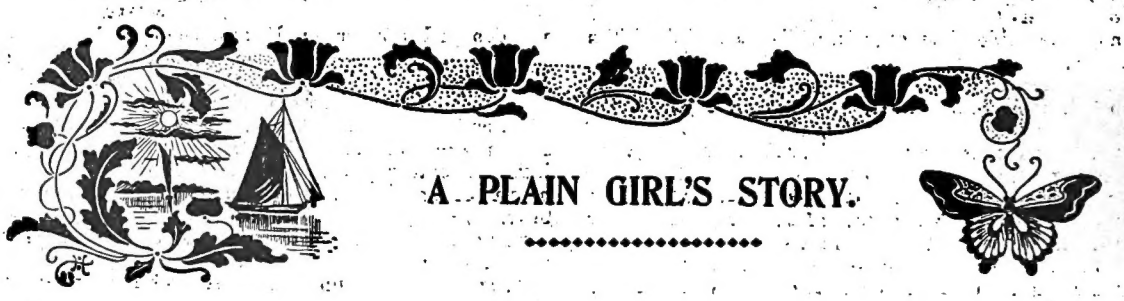

A PLAIN GIRL'S STORY.

"MR. RALPH DECKER is coming home from Queensland on a visit, and Aunt Mary says he is looking for a wife. What a chance for the Malsham girls!" laughed Kitty Rand; and she turned a bright, dark face, full of mischief, to her handsome, blonde sister Jean.

"We will give him an opportunity to judge of the beauty and grace of Malsham, won't we, dear?" laughed back the fair Jean. "As to finding a wife, why he must take his chances like the others who have come and gone—eh, Kitty?"

The two-seated, o'd-fashioned trap toiled on up the hill with the two handsome daughters on the back seat; and in front, with the kind-hearted, care-worn, farmer-father, sat the middle sister, Bess, small and brown and plain, except for a pair of large, demure, and thoughtful eyes.

"Father, dear, tell us about Mr. Decker," begged Jean. "He lived in Malsham when he was a boy. You must have known his father."

The farmer, thus suddenly addressed, flicked at the road-side ferns with his whip, and cleared his throat suspiciously before he could reply to the careless question. Quick-eyed Bess glanced at him keenly from under her long lashes.

"Something is the matter with father," she said to herself. "What can it be?"

Bessie was glad when they reached the farm, and her father had gone to the barn. She was her father's girl, every one said. Retiring, reticent and silent before strangers, she was the family sunbeam, thoughtful, patient and bright, with interest in all pleasant things at home. When the young men who came to see Jean and Kitty were set aside for newcomers, they sometimes took refuge in Bessie's society, but they never sought her first, though she was only a year Kitty's junior. Somehow her mouth felt parched when she tried to talk to them and she could only answer in commonplaces.

Down in the depths of her loving heart sweet Bessie wondered if it would always be so. Would she always be passed by for her pretty sisters and never find the one who should understand her? It was hard to be neglected when all her friends were surrounded.

Bessie hastily ran out to the barn for a talk with her father. The old barn had been the scene of many such talks; and seated on the hay she and her father had often talked and planned for the good of the family. To-night, the tired man knew that she would follow him, however he tried to evade her.

"Now, father, dear, you know that you have to tell me, first or last."

"Go away, Bessie; there is nothing for a young girl like you to know. I must finish this to-night, and——"

"And I'll help you, dad. What is in that big blue envelope? Tell me the very worst of it, please."

The worst of it was quite bad enough. Worse than Bessie had dreamt. Years ago John Rand's youngest brother, a weak but never vicious boy, had run away, and had only been heard of at long intervals. The news which had come from various parts of the world had always been of a dissipated, profitless life. Brotherly letters remained unanswered, and he heeded not the request to return. This was the one grief of the farmer's life, for the young brother had been dear to him, and it was his cherished hope that one day the prodigal would come back to the home of his fathers, and to a better life.

But Edgar Rand had now caused himself to be heard from in the most unexpected and unwelcome fashion. He had deliberately forged on a bill the name of his brother for a sum so large, that the last penny of value on the little farm and the small sum laid by for a rainy day in the Grafton bank would just suffice to meet the obligation, as the forger had doubtless discovered in some manner. As matters now stood, the whole affair could be settled without publicity; but how could John Rand meet the trial?

To sell the home of his fathers would break his heart. No other place would be home to him; and to borrow a large sum of money, even, if it were possible to do so, would involve a debt which would burden his whole life, if, indeed, he should live long enough to pay it. The unhappy alternative was open disgrace, the publication to the world of a stain on a hitherto fair name.

John Rand bowed his head, and his frame shook with the depth of his grief, as he finished the story.

"Oh, father, dear, we will find some way out of it; we always have found a way out, you know. Don't take it to heart so, father,—don't. Let us be brave and talk it over."

"There is nothing to talk about, Bessie," said the farmer brokenly. "It is all plainly stated in the lawyer's letter, and there are just two weeks more in which to redeem the bill, or disgrace and ruin are upon us! How can Kitty and Jean and your mother bear it?"

Bessie did her best to cheer him, but her heart was heavy and she could see no way out of the trouble, although she forced a smile and pretended to be cheerful.

The next morning, a very small boy, with a big cart and an overgrown horse, was seen coming over the long hill towards the farm-house, and a three-cornered note from Bessie's particular and intimate friend, Miss Polly Waters, requested the pleasure of her company to stay over night, as the family were going away; and Bessie speedily made up her mind to accept the invitation. She resolved to confide a part of the story, at least, to Polly, whose big brother Dan was a solicitor in Grafton; and as the gaunt horse carefully adjusted his awkward proportions to the steep hills, Bessie's thoughts ran far ahead of his slow steps.

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"We can go over to Dan's office this afternoon," said Polly, when she heard the story, her bright face full of sympathy. "I can drive old Bunker, and we'll have a nice ride. Dan will manage it for you," said comforting Polly, whose ideas of financial matters were of the crudest sort.

Old Bunker was jogging away easily, with his head to the ground, when the girls noticed a few drops of rain.

"There is a sprinkle of rain," cried Polly.

"And look at that heavy cloud," said Bessie. "What if it should be a thunder storm, and not a house in sight, and Grafton fully two miles away! There! that's thunder!"

"Old Bunker is afraid of thunder; I never thought of that before," added his mistress. "Just look at him. He knows what is coming."

The gaunt, big horse, had pricked up his ears, and, with head erect, was listening in terror to a distant muttering sound, which came nearer and nearer, and burst in a great peal just over their heads. Polly jumped out and ran to the horse's head in time to save him from a frightened plunge forward, and just then the clouds which had rolled up unperceived behind them, began to pour down a blinding deluge of rain.

Bessie leapt out lightly, and the two hastily wrapped themselves in cloaks. The lightning began to flash in great sheets, and the rain poured down in torrents. They were now on the open road, unprotected by shelter of any kind. The big horse shivered in terror at each fresh peal of thunder, but partly soothed by Polly's coaxing, made no further effort to break away, though steadily refusing to move in either direction. And the storm increasing in fury, gave no signs of a speedy ending.

The girls held a consultation, and Polly insisted that Bessie must go on alone in order to see Dan before he left his office. After considerable hesitation, Bessie agreed, and started off alone on foot, leaving Polly to follow as soon as she could.

Bessie Rand trudged on bravely for about a mile in the face of the storm. Her boots, heavy with water, and clogged with mud, did not move easily over the soaked ground, her head beat and throbbed with the exertion, and her mouth was parched and dry; her cheeks burnt and her hair hung dishevelled about her face.

Just at the cross-roads, and when she felt that she must give up the fight against the elements, a welcome sound greeted her ears, and in a moment a swift-footed horse and a low phaeton came in sight.

The horse's head was turned towards Grafton, and a man, muffled closely from the storm, leant out and in a strange voice courteously offered her a place in the phaeton. Bessie, in her wet garments, breathless and anxious with her errand, gave no thought to the propriety of trusting herself to a stranger, but eagerly accepted the offer and bestowed herself in one corner of the phaeton with supreme thankfulness for the swiftness of the steed that was bearing them towards Grafton.

There was nothing to indicate to the young lady whether her companion was young or old, fair or dark, so thoroughly was he protected from the storm; nothing but a pair of dark eyes, which seldom looked towards her corner. The girl leant back exhausted on the cushions and closed her eyes.

"Do you live in Grafton?" she asked, when she at length opened her eyes.

The question was evidently a surprise, and it was a few minutes before the man answered.

"I am a stranger in this part of the country. I come from abroad. But what brings a young lady like you out in such a wild storm, alone and apparently in such haste?"

The question was as unconventional as her own, and recalled to Bessie all that had been disturbing her. She was never a careless talker, and was notably reticent about her own affairs; but the strangeness and the urgency of the situation seemed to have transformed her.

She scarcely knew herself, and something in the dark eyes compelled her to do what seemed then a perfectly natural and proper thing to do. With the first sound of her voice all the evil that she feared came rushing over her, and in trembling tones and with fast-falling tears she answered question after question in her own straightforward way, until she had told everything—her hopes and fears, the story of her quiet life, and of the old farm, the dear father and the handsome sisters and the dissipated uncle—all to this stranger.

The stranger made a few sympathetic observations, and by that time they were at the solicitor's office.

"Be sure that you tell no one," was Dan's parting injunction, after the whole story had been told, the sister rescued and the two made comfortable.

"But I did tell it to some one," said Bessie regretfully; "and to a stranger. How could I have been so foolish?"

The solicitor was not pleased. He had heard of no stranger in Grafton answering to her description, and it might lead to great mischief. However, it was done and nothing remained but to make the best of it.

Mr. Waters was going away on business and would take the papers with him and see what could be done. In the meantime, Bessie was to tell her father to take courage, and to leave everything for the present to the young solicitor, who had already won a reputation for marked ability.

But the days passed slowly and painfully in the old farm-house. Perhaps they were the last they would spend in the old home, they thought; and never had the woods and the hills looked so beautiful, never had the cheery sitting-room seemed so delightful. The father and daughter held many conferences on the long hillside, and the farmer's sallow cheeks gained new furrows.

Great was the excitement in the little house during the last days of Dan's absence, when a telegram made its unaccustomed way to the Rands. It contained but two words—"All right,"—but since it was signed with Dan's name it meant much.

Two days afterwards, Bessie accepted an invitation to spend a day or two with Polly, as her mother and father would be away. On the second morning, Polly surprised her by saying that her lover, Jack Matthews, was coming to tea, and would bring a gentleman friend with him.

Bessie felt rather nervous at first, but she soon recovered her spirits, and in much friendly chatter the morning and afternoon passed away.

The little tea-table was a marvel of homely beauty, with its fresh roses and dainty viands; and when Jack came in, and introduced his friend, Bessie found herself face to face with the much-talked of Mr. Ralph Decker.

All sorts of embarrassing thoughts rushed into the girl's mind, and made her forget her surprise that he should know Jack Matthews.

Bessie, as usual, could only utter monosyllabic replies;

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and when Jack and Polly slipped away for a few minutes, she could scarcely answer at all.

The young man seemed not in the least embarrassed, but talked on pleasantly enough. It seemed to Bessie that something in his eyes when he spoke looked strangely familiar. He began to talk of the weather, of the lack of rain, of storms, and of a horse he had once owned that would never travel in a thunderstorm and appeared to be maddened by lightning.

"The Waters' have just such a horse," ventured Bessie. "Polly and I were caught in a storm only a few days ago and old Bunker wouldn't stir."

"What did you do then?"

"Oh, we were going to Grafton on important business," she said hesitatingly, "and I had to go on and leave her, until her brother Dan could come after her."

"And did you walk all the way to Grafton?"

"Oh, no," said Bessie innocently. "Just as I came to the cross-roads, an old man in a phaeton came along all bundled up in cloak and rugs and let me ride with him."

Ralph Decker gave a quick side glance at the demure face of his companion, in which honesty and sympathy were plainly written, and he judged it best for his purpose to appeal to the latter. So he straightway heaved a sigh—not a mild, delicate sigh, but a deep drawn, heart-rending affair, which really cost an effort.

"Oh, what is it?" asked Bessie quickly. "Are you ill?"

"No, oh, no," said the young man; "I am not ill, but——" here he leant his head back against the chair, and spoke very gravely: "but it really makes me feel faint to think that, although I am barely thirty, I look so venerable that a young lady like yourself thinks I am an old man."

Bessie's eyes widened and lengthened to an edifying state of roundness, and her companion with difficulty repressed the laughter which would have ruined his cause. Over the young girl's expressive face a light was slowly creeping.

"I believe it was your own self," she said gravely, "and I told you all about my father, and the dreadful bill and all! Dan said it was such a bad thing to do, and it was so unlike me, for I always keep secrets. But I might have told it to someone worse," she added, impolitely and illogically, but in a hopeful tone.

"Doubtless, yes," said Ralph, and he allowed himself a little smile as he saw Bessie's face brightening. "Because, you see, if you would allow me, I am a friend of Dan's, and have known all about your family from my father, and just in the way of business." The young man was growing embarrassed in his turn. "Now, please, don't thank me, Miss Rand, for I really cannot endure being thanked, but I found that I could look after that bill in a way that I will explain to your father, and Dan understands it and says it is all right. I know the man who—er—wrote the bill; I met him abroad! And I know the man who holds it very well indeed."

"My uncle?" whispered Bessie faintly.

"Yes, and I could arrange the affair better than anyone else. I ventured to tell you myself, so that you need not worry about it any more, you know."

Tears and smiles and burning blushes united to make our plain girl almost beautiful, as she lifted her large eyes to meet the young man's gaze.

"I won't thank you," she said slowly, "if you really feel so badly about being thanked, but I do think you, are—uncommonly unusual. And you are a stranger to us all. It is so kind. Father will be so glad, for, in spite of Dan's telegram, we have been very anxious lest we should lose our home. It is about all we have for our old age, you see."

Ralph Decker laughed out loud this time, and Bessie relieved of her burden, laughed too, though she did not know what amused the stranger.

"Do you expect to spend your old age on the farm with your father and mother?" he added quizzically.

"They all expect it," said Bessie, with a cheerful laugh; for she felt so happy, not only because of the freedom from anxiety, but because relief had come through such a pleasant channel, that even a monotonous single life on the hills seemed a subject for congratulation.

But the young man came and sat beside her on the sofa, and said, with a laugh in his eyes, but very earnestly all the same:

"Do you know I have been thinking of a pleasant little home that I know of away in Queensland, and of a lonely man in that little home, and best of all, of a dear little girl, honest and true and tender-hearted, altogether too dear and nice to live alone when she could make such a charming wife. And I have been thinking that if she could forgive a man, as honest and true as herself, I firmly believe, for taking advantage of her frankness when she was in trouble, perhaps she might, in time—not a long time either—come to think rather kindly of this man and of the little home that would so gladly own her as its mistress."

It is quite impossible to guess what answer Bessie would have made, though her eyes shone with a happiness of which she was very much ashamed. But just at this moment Jack and Polly came in, and they all went in to tea. Bessie's eyes rested on his gravely, but with a delightfully pleasant expression.

Like the very wise man that he was, however—and the men are few who really understand the best and the quickest way to a woman's heart—he did not allude to the matter again that day.

He met her three days later near her home, and they met each day for the next week. He told her of his plans and many other things; and Bessie listened, blushed at his words, and thought she must be dreaming, but it was a very happy dream.

And as Ralph Decker was obliged to be back by a certain date, and as there would still be two sisters at the farm-house, and as Ralph loved Bessie with all his heart, which was a large one, and as Bessie could not deny that she regarded him with something much dearer than friendship, it happened that there was a pretty wedding in a very short space of time at the little church under the hill, and all the young men and maidens came, and the plain sister could hardly be told from the pretty ones.

And with blinding tears of sorrow at the parting, and of joy because of her suddenly given rich store of happiness, Bessie said good-bye to the dear home-folks and went away with her big husband to the little home which she long lived to bless.

L. WISCARD WORMS.

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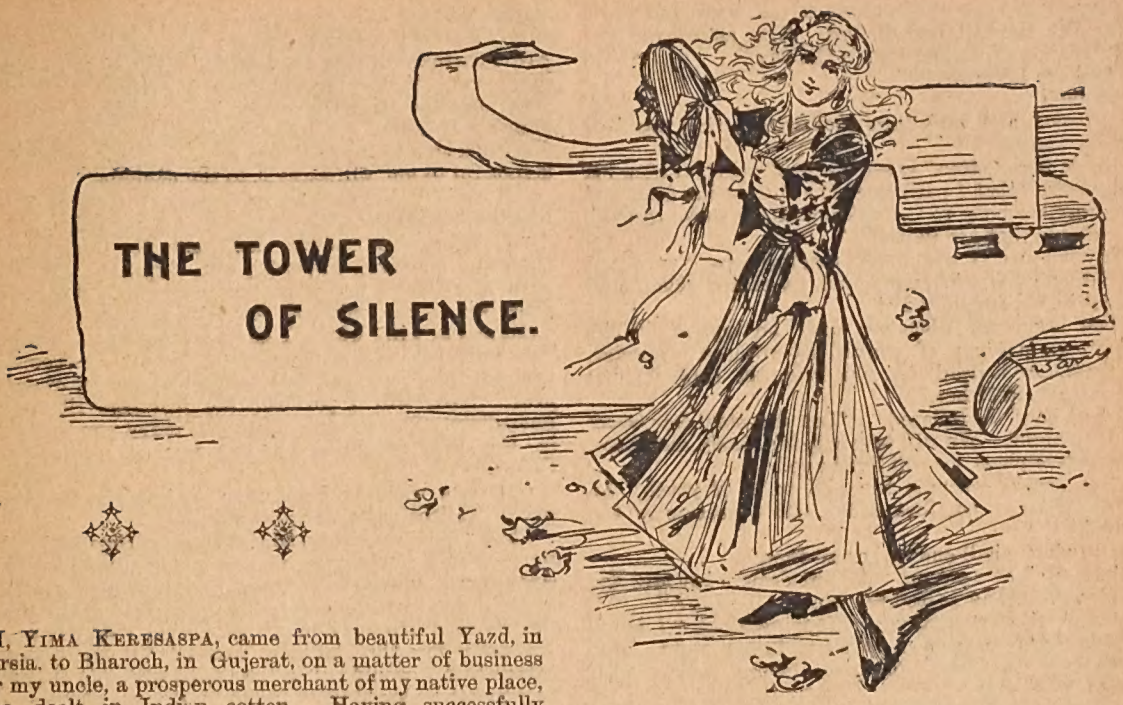

THE TOWER OF SILENCE.

I, Yima Keresaspa, came from beautiful Yazd, in Persia, to Bharoch, in Gujerat, on a matter of business for my uncle, a prosperous merchant of my native place, who dealt in Indian cotton. Having successfully accomplished my mission, I paused on my homeward journey to deliver a letter of introduction to a friend of my uncle's, one Sayuzdri, a *mobed* (priest of the middle order) of our sect, the Shenshai, resident in Bombay.

Arrived in the city, I wandered to the Parsee settlement on beautiful Back Bay beach. The situation was delightful, and as I had become somewhat heated with my walk, I reclined on a rustic seat in the shade of a jungle of palms and allowed my eyes to take in the landscape beauties spread out before them.

I was suddenly aroused by hearing a long-drawn sigh. Turning quickly I saw, not far distant, the most beautiful woman it has ever been my lot to behold.

She was a type of our women, but, oh! it was an idealised type, excelling in all the graces. Her face was wondrous fair, her form delicately rounded in the full blossom of its development, and her hands were small and shapely.

Her eyes were large, lustrous and dark, and looked out over the sea with a sadness and melancholy that pierced my heart. Instinctively I rose and approached her. She looked up, startled, and then the fear fled from her eyes, and the light that filled them flashed into my soul and intoxicated me with the first draught of love.

"Forgive me," I said. "I heard you sigh and was surprised that so much sorrow and beauty should be found together."

"Comeliness," she answered, in a soft voice, "is no armour against sadness, nor is purity of heart a protection from the wiles of the evil-minded. However, it is not meet that I should pass words with a stranger, even though so gentle and so kindly spoken."

She discreetly veiled her face with the folds of silk that hung down over her left arm and turned away.

"Ah, fair one," I murmured, "grant me yet a moment! I come from afar and am seeking the priest, Sayuzdri."

"You know him?" she cried, turning upon me with sparkling eyes, the veil partially dropping away.

"I have that which insures me his friendship," I made answer. "He is an old friend of my uncle's, who lives in distant Yazd."

"He is a good man," she said slowly; "a faithful friend to me. There is his house, yonder."

She pointed to the peak of a dwelling, just visible through the trees.

"When you go to him," she continued, "tell him that it was Ardvi Navazza who directed you, unhappy Ardvi who directed——"

"Yima Keresaspa," I answered, in a rapture of happiness.

"Even so," she responded, again sadly as she replaced the silken folds over her face.

She paused before parting and then extended her small hand. I caught it and pressed it to my lips. I would have held it, but she drew away and disappeared from my sight.

Peerless, unhappy Ardvi! From that moment I loved her with my very soul.

I found Sayuzdri, delivered my letter and was received by him as his son. It may well be imagined that I lost no time in approaching the subject nearest my heart.

"I was directed here, reverend Sayuzdri, by a beautiful maiden who bade me tell you that it was Ardvi, the unhappy, who had performed the service."

"Poor Ardvi," he murmured; "victim of——"

"How," I cried. "What mean you, reverend one?"

His sharp eyes were bent upon me.

"Two weeks from to-morrow," he said, "I shall light

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the lamp of incense at the house of the bride and there repeat the nuptial benediction. The astrologer has consulted the stars, and that is the day."

"And the bride is——"

"Ardvi!"

I groaned and sank into a chair, covering my face with my hands.

"Ah, it were better," cried the good priest, raising his hands aloft, "that I performed the rites of the dead and bore away her body to the dakhma, there to be a prey to the vultures that are waiting!"

"Say not so!" I exclaimed, starting up; "surely, if the maiden's heart has not found its choice, this union will not be consummated?"

"You know not what you say," he replied. "The bridegroom is a man of wealth, but without character. Ardvi's father is dead, and she is in the care of those eager to get rid of her."

"I love her," I declared. "Let me steal her away this very night. We will take ship for Persia, and there, in my native place, we will live happily."

"You speak with the fire and folly of youth," he replied calmly; "you love Ardvi with a passion of the moment."

"But which shall endure for all time."

"And she," he went on, "did she declare her love for you before you had passed ten words together?"

"Alas!" I answered, with drooping head, "I know not whether my passion finds favour in her sight. But it was not her part to pass loving words with another."

"And that other a stranger," he said forcibly. "Do not misunderstand me, Yima. I do not frown upon your love, although the suddenness of its awakening furnishes grave doubts of its constancy. Come to me a week hence. In the meantime, I will see Ardvi, and if she gives her consent to a plan I have long thought of, and you are still in the same mind, something shall be done."

I caught his hands in both my own.

"But," he added, "you are not to see her again until the culmination of our plot, if so it is to be."

Sorely against my will I consented and went away.

At the end of a week I returned, but Sayuzdri had not been successful and held forth little hope; at the same time, he directed me to call upon him again in a day or two. Once more I called, and this time the good man met me with a smiling face, invoking upon me the blessings of Ormuzd.

"You have seen Ardvi?" I asked eagerly.

"I have seen her," he replied, "and if you have courage equal to the passion you profess, all may yet be well."

"My courage, as well as my passion, reverend one," said I, "will bear the test of any trial. Who would not love Ardvi and dare the world for her sake?"

"Headstrong words, my son; and yet, I have observed you well. You come of a good stock. Ardvi is not insensible to the love you profess; even though she might be tempted to doubt—it is so sudden. Listen, Yima! A great and terrible thing is that which we are about to do. If our plot prospers, and I unite your fate with that of Ardvi, it may happen that you have wrongly read your heart and that misery will be visited upon you both. Do not speak! I know what you would say," and thereupon he bowed his head and solemnly recited a prayer for guidance.

The prayer over, Sayuzdri continued:

"There is a drug, my son, whose effect is to throw the one who partakes of it into a trance so like unto death that the wisest cannot detect a sign of life. To-day, Ardvi partakes of this drug and to-night she will seemingly die. In the morning, I will perform the funeral obsequies, the *nassesalars* will bear the body away to Malabar Hill and the stone of parting, and thence you, disguised as a priest and assisted by a young priest who is faithful to me, will carry it to the dakhma."

"How is it possible for us to usurp the offices of the regular attendants of the dakhma?" I queried.

"I have some power and influence among the faithful," answered Sayuzdri, with dignity. "What I have done is neither a profanation nor a dishonour. Once within the dakhma, you will apply to Ardvi the restoratives with which I shall provide you; then you will wait within the stone walls for night to come so that you may return to this house under cover of darkness. Here will I perform the marriage rites, and immediately thereafter a boat will carry you to a ship in the bay which is on the eve of sailing for Persia."

Overcome with joy, I fell upon my knees at the reverend man's feet and thanked him.

That night I remained in the house of Sayuzdri. In the morning, he hurried me into one of the white linen suits worn by the priests. As an additional precaution, my face was partially covered with one fold of the cloth that formed the headdress. After this, I set out without delay for the dakhma, assured by my priestly patron that I would not be interfered with and that the only priest I should meet would be the one who was to act with me.

I shall never forget that morning on Malabar Hill, the strangeness of the adventure fixing each scene and incident upon my mind with an intensity which makes everything as vivid to-day as it was then, a score of years ago.

"Ardvi," I murmured, as I betook myself slowly towards the dakhma, "is to be saved from a fate worse than death, but we are to pass to our happiness only through this temple of the dead!"

I had learnt this much of Ardvi's history. Her mother had been married again and her step-father had forced Ardvi to bear his name. The unfortunate girl was not esteemed in her home as a daughter should be, and she was to be married to a wealthy Hindu, a notorious character in Bombay. As to this alliance, Ardvi had had little to say. Everything had been arranged by her step-father. The Parsees have a law forbidding intermarriages with the natives, but in Ardvi's case it was considered that Parsee laws did not apply, her father not being of that religion. Poor girl! What wonder that, in order to escape the unhappy influences that surrounded her, she was willing to resort to any measure, however desperate?

At the dakhma I was met by a tall figure, hooded in white linen, and was asked if I were the young Persian. I replied in the affirmative and would have spoken further, but the priest laid a finger on his lips and made a gesture which plainly said that he understood all. As we stood there, I looked below and saw the *nassesalars* ascending towards us, bearing the supposed corpse of Ardvi. Before them walked Sayuzdri; behind them came the cortege.

"They have reached the stone of parting," said my companion; "we must descend and meet them."

My nerves tingled with excitement as we advanced towards the waiting group, raised the bier and bore it into the dakhma.

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Already were the vultures flapping their wings and flying towards the Tower.

Within the Tower of Silence, we placed our insensible burden down upon the grating, and I drew the spotless covering from Ardvi's face.

"Is she not beautiful?" I murmured, all the passion of my soul surging to the surface.

As I bent over the form of my loved one, I felt a sudden and strong pressure about my neck, and was drawn forcibly backward and cast upon the floor of the Tower. For a moment, astonishment paralysed my limbs even as my tongue, because of the gripping at my throat, clove to the roof of my mouth. My eyes stared upward and I saw a demonical face bending over me. It was my supposed confederate!

He now disclosed, beneath the white linen vestments, the garb of a Hindu. Upon my breast he placed his heavily-shod foot and twisted with unmerciful strength the folds of the *roonal* which he had cast about my head.

"I will strangle the life from your body!" he hissed. "You thought to trick me out of my prize, but you shall not. You shall die and Ardvi will be mine! I have sworn it!"

How had all this come to pass? As I lay there, helpless and slowly choking to death, I wondered vaguely what had gone wrong with Sayuzdri's plans. I gave up all thoughts of life and resigned myself to my fate; but, suddenly, there came a rush of beating wings and the vultures swooped down upon my enemy and attacked him beak and talon. He was obliged to use his hands in fighting them off and this caused him to release me.

As I sprang up I heard a cry of anguish and rage, and through the legion of flapping wings and brown bodies I saw the bleeding face of the Hindu. He ran madly towards the centre of the dakhma, tripped, fell and plunged wildly against one of the grated tiers. He was blinded by the blood from his wounds and could not see whither he went. Cursing and groaning, the wretched man again rushed forward impetuously, stumbled as before and dashed himself headforemost against the wall of the Tower. Falling to the floor, he lay motionless, with the vultures hovering about him.

Throwing one arm across my face, I hurried forward and fought off the infuriated birds while I knelt a moment at the Hindu's side. My amazement was great when I discovered that he was dead. In his headlong plunge against the rocky wall he had slain himself.

Returning to Ardvi, I hastily applied the restoratives which I had brought. The vultures did not annoy us, the lifeless form of the Hindu claiming their attention, and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing my beloved one open her bright eyes and gaze up into my face.

"Yima," she whispered, "your love is indeed great since you dare so much for me. I will endeavour to prove myself worthy of it."

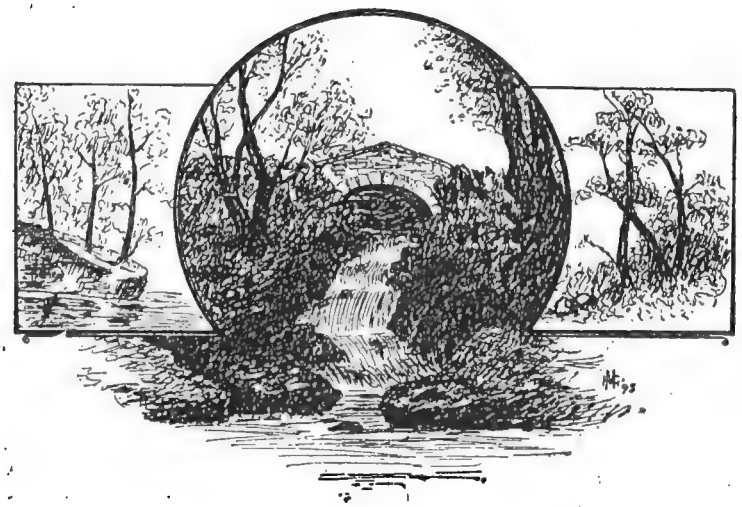
With these words she arose and pressed her lips to my bleeding forehead. Then we hurried to a spot where we should be safe from the vultures.

That night, Ardvi and I, hand in hand, descended Malabar Hill, thankful that our plans had succeeded in spite of all difficulties.

We found Sayuzdri pacing the floor of his dwelling, greatly agitated. The young priest who was to have been my confederate had visited him but a short time before our arrival and had told of being bound hand and foot, in his own home, by a trio of Hindus, one of whom had donned his sacred habit and repaired to the dakhma. The good man heard my story with thankfulness and commended my future days to the care of Ormuzd. How the Hindu, who had met his fate in the Tower of Silence, became possessed of our secret remains unknown to Sayuzdri and myself, even unto this day.

Within a few hours after returning to the home of the good priest, Ardvi and I had been joined in wedlock; and we then took ship for Persia, arriving in due time in safety at Yazd.

W. ROGERSON.



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TWO HATS.

A FLASH of yellow light striking downwards upon a man's face and breast. Faintly visible, behind the light, a dark and tall figure in uniform. Kneeling on the edge of the light another figure also in uniform.

The kneeling man raised his head, bringing his own face into the light.

"Do you know him, Warner?" he asked.

"No," answered the other. "Is he drunk?"

"Dying."

There was a moment's pause. One officer supported the dying man's head, while the other, keeping the light steady upon the stranger, took mental note of his appearance.

He saw a man of nearly fifty. The pallor of death struggled through the bronze hue of the skin. Abundant wavy, grey hair clustered about the forehead, which was broad and high.

The man was dressed in garments of a dark colour. His waistcoat was open, showing a great red stain upon the shirt.

"There's the knife," said Constable Warner, pointing downwards.

Breen picked it up. It was a strange weapon, with a very thin blade, pointed like a needle, yet had a cutting edge. Its appearance suggested the Far East.

"We must carry him to Dr. Borden's," said Breen. "We shall just catch him before he goes to bed."

He bent forward to lift the upper part of the body, and in so doing raised the man's right hand, bringing it into the circle of the light.

"What's he got there?" cried Warner.

Breen took the object from the man's hand. It was a lead-pencil.

"Can he have written anything?" asked Breen. "I don't see any paper."

"Perhaps he scratched something on the stones," rejoined the other, holding his lantern close down to the pavement.

"I can't see anything there," said Breen. "We must not waste this fellow's time looking for it. He hasn't much to spare, and what little he has may be worth a good deal if he can be restored to consciousness."

Hastily lifting the senseless burden, they bore it to the doctor's, and the physician succeeded in restoring the man to consciousness—at least for a moment.

Breen, Warner and the doctor were bending over him when he opened his eyes.

"Speak quick, if you're got any questions to ask," whispered the doctor.

"Who did this?" said Breen, speaking very distinctly.

There was no answer, although there was an indication of comprehension in the man's eyes. The question was three times repeated; then the doctor whispered:

"Try something else. Ask his name."

"Who are you?" asked Breen.

The man made an effort to speak, but the words could not be understood. Breen bent down till his ears almost touched the dying man's lips. The others heard only a faint, muttering sound. Immediately the man's body stiffened; a shudder passed over it, the eyes became fixed and glassy.

"Dead!" cried the doctor. "Did you catch what he said?"

"The name on the stone," replied Breen. "That's what he said just before he fell back."

Warner stepped towards the door, and he and his mate hurried out, leaving the doctor beside the body. In a few minutes they returned, bring with them a small flagstone which they had torn out of the pavement. On the clean, white surface of this stone had been written with a lead pencil:

"Henry Owen,
90 Orchard Street."

The doctor read the words, and then exclaimed:

"The murderer's name!"

But Breen pointed out that the waistcoat had been deliberately opened, and held up a hat which he found near the spot, and showed the same name written on the band. That appeared to disprove the murder theory.

An examination showed that the clothing was new and "ready-made," and that the pockets had not been

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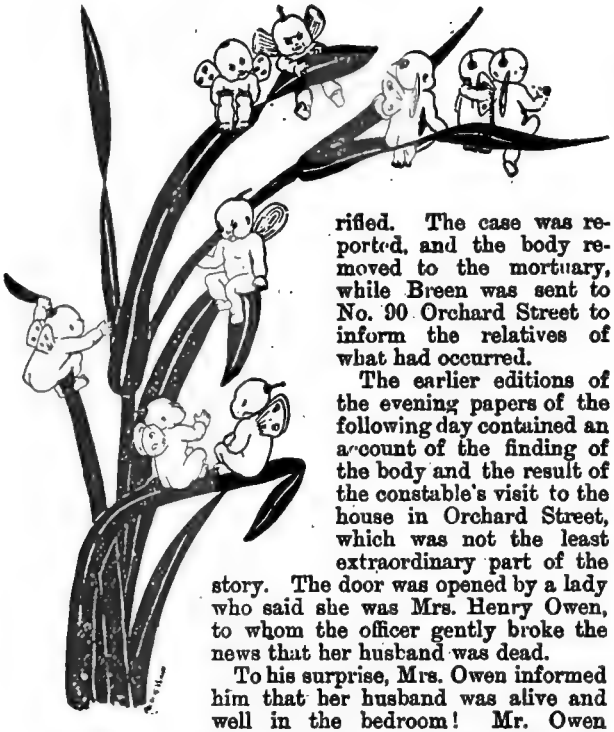

rifled. The case was reported, and the body removed to the mortuary, while Breen was sent to No. 90 Orchard Street to inform the relatives of what had occurred.

The earlier editions of the evening papers of the following day contained an account of the finding of the body and the result of the constable's visit to the house in Orchard Street, which was not the least extraordinary part of the story. The door was opened by a lady who said she was Mrs. Henry Owen, to whom the officer gently broke the news that her husband was dead.

To his surprise, Mrs. Owen informed him that her husband was alive and well in the bedroom! Mr. Owen then came forward and indignantly described it as "another stupid police blunder"; but when he heard of the writing on the stone he was nonplussed. Then Breen showed the name on the band inside the hat—which he had taken with him for purposes of identification—and the constable noticed that Mr. Owen started violently. Finally, when Breen described the man, Mrs. Owen nearly swooned.

The latest editions contained particulars of further developments. Inquiries showed that Mr. Owen possessed a hat exactly similar to that worn by the dead man, but without the name of the owner, and that it bore the same maker's name. It was proved that he had passed the scene of the occurrence that evening at half-past ten. He had appeared confused by certain questions put to him, and the police had decided to arrest him.

The mystery surrounding the case called for the superior ability of an experienced man, and it was handed to the celebrated Inspector Harrison. The latter knew Breen well. The constable was anxious to become a detective and had given promise of considerable ability; moreover, Breen had on a recent occasion rendered the Inspector a great service; so, for these reasons, Harrison was determined to help the constable, and asked for his assistance in the case.

On the second morning Inspector Harrison and Breen were in the mortuary, as the former wished to view the body and see the position of the wound.

"The writing on the stone could scarcely have been done by the man who lies here, as you say," said Harrison. "It is too regular for a dying man."

"That's what I thought, sir," replied Breen. "And that's why I went to Owen's office and managed to get some specimens of his handwriting. I hope you'll help me if I get censured for exceeding my duty."

"You're all right, Breen. It was a smart move. And the handwriting is strikingly like that on the stone," returned Harrison.

"Any news of the identification of the body?" asked the detective, as he prepared to depart a few minutes later.

"No, so far as I know," replied Breen.

As these words were spoken, the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of an old man dressed like a well-to-do farmer. His face indicated intelligence and education, but he had something of that peculiar hesitating manner which marks the man unaccustomed to the turmoil of a great city.

"What do you want?" asked Breen, stepping up to the visitor, who was walking towards the place where the body lay.

"Why, as I was going by," said the old countryman timidly, "I thought I'd step in and look at the body."

"What for?" asked the officer. "Do you think you'll recognise it?"

"Recognise it! Well, I should say so. Why, I'm the poor fellow's uncle!"

"Whose uncle?"

"Why, Henry Owen's uncle."

"Henry Owen isn't dead."

"Not dead?" echoed the old man as with trembling hands he drew a copy of a newspaper out of his pocket. "Why, this paper says that he was murdered and that his body was brought here."

"That newspaper has made a blunder," said Harrison, stepping forward. "It was at first thought that the body was Mr. Owen's, but he is alive and well."

"Thank heaven!" said the old man fervently. "Gentlemen, you can't imagine what I've suffered coming here. I've thought over and over again of what his wife must feel, and what I should do to comfort her. And to think it was all what you might call a hoax, and Henry wasn't dead after all! But who is the poor fellow?"

"We do not know," said Harrison, leading the old man to the rude coffin in which the body lay.

At the first glance at the face the farmer started in surprise.

"Well, I don't so much blame them after all," he said. "He certainly looks like Henry."

This statement was a surprise to Breen, who had seen Henry Owen, and had not remarked any striking resemblance between him and the dead man. Yet it now seemed to him that there was some grounds for the farmer's remark.

"Yes, he is very much like Henry," continued the stranger, "but older."

"Do you know Henry Owen intimately?" asked Breen.

"Why, if you come to that, I ain't seen him for ten years," replied the stranger. "But when he was a boy, and even after he grew up, I used to see him every day. Yes, I was very fond of Henry, and of Horace, too."

"Who was Horace?" asked Harrison.

"Henry's elder brother. He's been dead a dozen years or more. He was a wild boy, and ran away from home. That was in '77 or '78 if I remember right."

"Horace ran away?"

"Yes, I'm afraid he was rather the black sheep of the family. But Henry was steady enough—as steady as most boys. That's why he got his father's money, when brother John died. John was a rich man, and his money has been well taken care of by Henry."

"And you say it's ten years since you've seen Henry?"

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"Yes, quite that."

There was a moment of silence, during which Harrison, who was observing the old man closely, saw him give a sudden start as the bright eyes behind the steel framed glasses rested upon some objects on the table near by. Among them was the old-fashioned gold watch that had been found in the dead man's pocket.

"It appears to me that I've seen that watch before," said Mr. Owen.

He stepped forward and took up the watch.

"It can't be possible, and yet it is, it must be," he murmured. "Gentlemen, this is the body of Horace Owen. I've been trying to fight against that conclusion ever since I saw it, but now I'm convinced."

"I thought you said Horace died long ago," said the Inspector.

"We thought he had been lost at sea," replied the old man. "Yet drowned people come back in fact as well as in the story books. This must be Horace, for here's the watch that I gave him when he was a boy."

"How do you know it? There must be a good many watches like it in the world."

"Very likely," responded Mr. Owen, "but I'm sure of this one. Let me show you what an old man's memory can do. It was twenty odd years ago that I gave the boy that watch, yet I'll tell you the number."

Breen took the watch and opened it in a twinkling. Then, turning to Mr. Owen, he said questioningly:

"Well?"

"Shall I give it to you forwards or backwards?" asked the old man with a smile.

"That settles it," said Breen, and he handed the watch to Keith, who saw at a glance what Mr. Owen and the officer meant.

The number was 2,3 2. Owen gave it just as the inspector looked up.

"This is a strong point in the identification," said the detective, "yet it does not go far towards solving the real puzzle. How do you account for the name on the stone?"

"Horace, after he was stabbed, wrote his brother's name and address," said the farmer. "That's natural enough. He wanted his body taken there."

"That might do but for one curious fact," said Harrison. "The writing is not Horace's, but Henry's, and it was done before the stabbing—not after."

"If what you say is true," said the old man slowly, "I don't understand it at all."

"Had the brothers ever quarrelled?" asked the inspector.

"Only about Florence," was the reply. "They both wanted to marry her, and we thought she'd take Horace, though he was so wild. But she took Henry, and there it ended."

"Without bitter feeling?"

"Without an open quarrel," said the old man impressively. "Heaven only knows what a man may feel when the woman he loves is married, and he is not the bridegroom. Yet that was years ago, and it certainly cannot account for the murder of the disappointed man by the successful one."

The old man further said that Horace cut his chest accidentally with a knife when a boy, and, no doubt the scar was still visible; but an examination of the body yielded no result.

Some hours after the scene in the mortuary, Harrison called upon Mrs. Henry Owen.

"I am engaged in the investigation of the death of the man whose body was found in York Alley the night before last," said he, "and I thought that you would be anxious to know what progress has been made."

"Indeed I am," replied the lady. "My husband's uncle has told me of the identification. I cannot credit it; and even if it is correct, not one-hundredth part of the mystery is explained."

"It seemed so to me at first," said the detective, "but on further consideration I decided that the identification carried with it almost the full story of the affair."

"You do not suspect my husband?" she said anxiously, but in a firm voice.

"I am sorry to be obliged to tell you," he said, "that I believe your husband struck the fatal blow."

"You are mad to think so," she exclaimed, growing paler.

"Let us consider the evidence," the Inspector rejoined. "I am glad to find you so calm."

"The evidence in the case," he continued, "takes us back fifteen years. At that time you were loved by two brothers. One of them was a wild and reckless fellow, the other prudent and thrifty. You made the choice that wisdom dictated; that is, if love could go where worldly judgment pointed the way.

"You were married, and for five years you lived in Southampton. Then you moved here and have dwelt in this house ever since.

"I learn from the man—now very old—of whom you at first rented, and later bought this house, that all the negotiations were conducted by you."

Mrs. Owen started to her feet.

"What do you mean by this?" she exclaimed.

"I see that I may omit a large part of the history," said the detective calmly. "You already see its bearing. Let us come at once to the evidence of your husband's uncle. He tells me that though he has been here often, he has never met your husband in this house."

"Well, what of that? It happened so."

"I cannot find that anyone who knew Henry Owen in Southampton ever saw him here. When you moved you severed all old connections.

"You made new friends here. You led a new life. With whom?"

The woman covered her face with her hands.

"Mrs. Owen," the inspector continued, "when I learnt that your husband's only relative had not seen him for ten years; when I discovered that ten years ago he apparently began a new business career; when, finally, I looked for that old scar on the breast of the dead man, and did not find it, then I concluded that here was a strange love story to unravel."

"Speak out," she cried.

"I decided to look for that scar on the breast of a living man," said Harrison. "That the two men who figured in this case were Henry and Horace Owen I could not doubt. But I decided that Henry lay dead in his coffin, and that Horace was alive and in prison.

"I, therefore, sought the prisoner. I asked him, in the interests of justice, to permit me to see his breast. He refused, of course. You should have seen how his hand clutched his coat above that scar."

"Stop!" cried the woman. "You have said that my husband's hand struck the blow which killed that unhappy man. When you said that whom did you mean?"

"I meant your lawful husband," said Harrison. "This was no murder. The condition of the clothing is strong evidence; but stronger than that, in fact conclusive, is the surgical examination of the wound. The man

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could have sought help; he could have made an outcry. Had murder been done by means of such a wound alone, the whole neighbourhood would have been alarmed.

"No; Henry Owen's own hand inflicted the wound upon his breast. I can guess the cause. I have learnt that he arrived here on the day before yesterday in a sailing vessel from Calcutta. Doubtless he has been absent ten years.

"Something parted you. He strayed a long time, and then came back to renew the old life. He learnt your secret, and then he struck that blow.

"But first he wrote those words upon the stone. But for them he might have been buried in an unmarked grave, and your sin might not have been punished in this world. Perhaps that thought came to him at the very last. At any rate his purpose is accomplished.

"This, I am sure, is an accurate outline of the story, sufficient, perhaps, for my purpose. But there are details which you can supply, and I need not tell you that further concealment is useless."

Mrs. Owen crossed the room and leant against the window, pressing her forehead to the cool glass. When she turned, her face showed Harrison what he wished to see—that the struggle was over.

She sat down, and motioned the detective to a seat before her. Then she told her story:

"I have always loved Horace," she said. "I married his brother because he was to be his father's heir.

"Naturally, we did not live happily. It was my fault. My husband grew morose. He gave up his business; he shunned all his friends until they almost forgot him.

"Our unhappiness was known in a general way to our neighbours in Southampton. I was anxious to get away. I persuaded my husband to let me take a lease of this house. He consented, but took no interest in what was to be—as I thought—his new home. In fact, he never came to see it.

"Just before we were ready to come here, we had a quarrel, more violent than any that had preceded. He left me, declaring that he would end a life which I had made unbearable.

"Days passed, and he did not return. I kept my own counsel. My neighbours knew nothing of what had occurred.

"One day I read in a newspaper that a drowned body had been found in the Mersey and had been taken to the mortuary in Liverpool. I went there, for a picture in a newspaper resembled Henry.

"The face of the dead man was greatly distorted, but I thought it was my husband's. The resemblance was certainly remarkable. The clothes were not his. They were rougher than any I had ever seen him wear. I fancied them a disguise.

"I happened to raise my eyes. A man was approaching the slab. It was Horace Owen. I had thought him dead, but he had been living in Liverpool, and had read the account of the finding of the body, and had seen the newspaper picture which had been so like my husband.

"I made a secret sign to him to be silent. He, too, believed the body to be Henry's, but he held his peace at my command.

"We left the mortuary separately, but met not far away. There I unfolded to him the plan which had leapt into my mind the instant that I saw his face.

"It involved both love and money. If Henry's death became known, I should, by the terms of his uncle's will, have only a small portion of his estate. If Horace personated Henry, we could keep all.

"It was easily done. We came to this new house, and all went well. The body that had been found in the river was buried in a pauper's grave.

"I had no suspicion that my husband was alive until he appeared at this house the day before yesterday. You can imagine how dreadful was our meeting. Yet he was generous. He said that he would go away and never trouble me. But his resolution failed, and a desire both to end his wretched life and to be revenged conquered him.

"Try to think what I have suffered since that night!"

Harrison was doubtful for a moment as to what course he should pursue. The woman's agony moved his pity, yet there was no real choice. The story must be told; for there was a fortune to be distributed to the rightful persons, to say nothing of the moral aspects of the case.

The detective secured the release of Horace Owen, and the couple vanished from those parts.

Their remarkable story did, indeed, involve some strange coincidences. The similarity of penmanship discovered by Breen, was, however, not to be included among the doings of chance, for naturally it had been Horace's first task to acquire his brother's style of handwriting.

The matter of the two hats was more in the line of chance, yet the firms of the clothiers and hatters were among the best known in the city; their advertisements were in every paper; and it was not wonderful that a man just home from a far country should buy new attire. He must have written his name in the hat as the result of an old habit. It will be remembered that at that time he had no premonition of the fate that awaited him.

J. Johnson.

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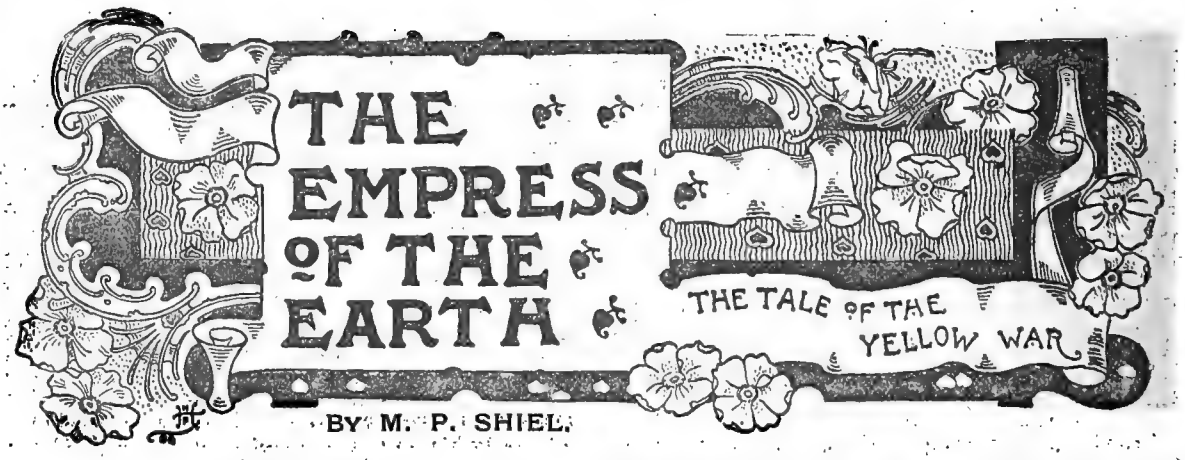

BY M. P. SHIEL.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Yellow Terror.

The 500 "Chinese", who had come to Petersburg "seeming poor," and who were to be "sent back to their own country," were not Chinese at all, but Japanese; and before they could be "sent back" they had mysteriously scattered, and disappeared in the general mass of Europeans. They were intended to report to Yen How when the moment had come for him, personally, to move forward towards Europe.

The Jehu of that wild four-horse chariot still sat far back in his seat, the reins taut in his hands. The four-fold van of his army was upon Europe, while its rear was still upon Pekin. It stretched across the world.

Between those two mighty masses of mountains which, like the ramparts of the New Jerusalem, have locked in the Celestial Empire from contact, or knowledge, or suspicion, of the vague world beyond, they came. The Dead-Sea-lake after old ages, was a-move, a-flow. Through that mysterious land, which the race-venom of the Mongol race has made a third unknown Pole in the midst of the earth, crawled the weird procession, the unbounded caravan. The wild elephant, and the mild-eyed zebu saw them with wonder, and the summer monsoon went gadding with the marvellous tidings toward the plain, and over the sea to Africa, gossiping that there above, on the high flat land, was a New Thing moving under the sun. The sources of the Me-Kong, the Saluen, and the Irrawady, which only the eye of the couchant tigress, and of the yellow man, have seen, beheld their week-long passage, and heard the creak of the cart, and the cry of the camel, and the muling of a child at the breast.

They heard also the sudden scream with which the Chinese laughed.

Never was so sloven and pell-mell an army; never so straggling, and lumbering, and clumsy an array; but never a power more eager, and more certain, to reach its goal.

The Friant Division of the French Army, going from Presburgh to Austerlitz, once marched forty-five miles a day for two consecutive days. But never a day which did not see this far-spread host seventeen leagues further towards its aim. They could not be called infantry, though millions, during great part of the way, went on foot; for the armoured carts which Yen How had provisioned, the presence of which spread out the host from continent to continent, were the chief means of locomotion, and continually changed their occupants. There was, moreover, no care for life; if a man was ill, if he dropped out of the march like a bird from the flight, he was left to perish, or to return.

The length of all the units of a single army corps in column of route was so unlike anything with which we are familiar, that the figures are incapable of conveying any real idea of its vastness. If the corps could have marched on a single road, its length would have been 1,200 miles, that is to say, the length of three Englands; and the entire corps would have taken eleven days to pass a given point.

This inconceivable worm of humanity contained among its two millions of individuals women incapable of walking a thousand yards, children born since the march began, old men, boys and girls of ten.

Each of these pilgrimaging masses of men was in itself a nation, such as those of which Cæsar writes, only probably far vaster. Its members came, nearly all, from the same province, spoke the same dialect, had been impelled forward by the same set of influences, and been drilled by the same captains. Only its officers were, in the main, Japanese; and into the rank and file of each corps had also been drafted a hundred thousand Japanese, all men.

At the time when the five hundred scattered at Petersburgh, and Yen How, immediately afterwards, received from them through Vladivostok and Nagasaki the news that all Europe was ready to receive him—there were already of these nomad nations a hundred-and-forty on the march.

Some of these hosts (particularly those that passed by the depression of the Jungarie Mountains, along the source of the Irtush, where the central plateau of Asia finds its western gate) had need to traverse tracts of desert country, bare of flocks and cattle, bare even of forage for mule and camel. No widespread difficulty, however, as to food and forage was felt even by these. Whole districts of China had been left bare, as though eaten up by human locusts, by the successive corps which, as it were, bore the country away with them.

Already, on the march, the soldiers of Yen How—men who had lived upon skeleton scarcity from birth, at the rate of some fraction of a penny per week—began to taste the luxuries of life. Not merely dried vegetables, rice, salt, and tea he saw squandered round him, but sausages, preserved meats, fresh meats. The administrative convoys and regimental trains, intended for the distribution of supplies to the troops, covered many a mile; the administrative convoys being in four echelons, two half a day's march in the rear of the regimental trains, and the other two intended to bring up possible additional supplies from the rear. Auxiliary convoys, also in four echelons, and containing many hundreds of vehicles, took up deposits of rice, biscuits and hay, made long before the commencement of operations, at cantonments which extended to the furthest bounds of Chinese and Thibetan territory. They also carried supplies of preserved meats and forage, and followed the army corps at a distance of two days' march.

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Each individual of an army corps, besides, was compelled to carry seven pounds of food in some utensil corresponding to a mess-tin or haversack; this to form a reserve not to be touched, except when every other means of supply failed.

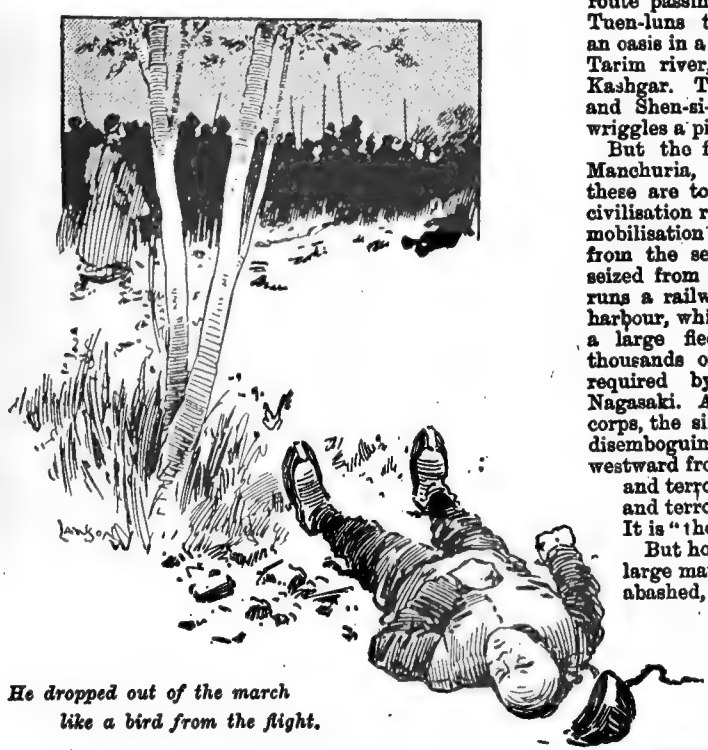
During the process of mobilisation, each division of infantry, and each army corps headquarters, had already vast collections of requisitioned herds of animals, from dogs to camels, sufficient for two days' meat, but intended, by the help of other provisions, to last for weeks. On the march, the cattle marched between the advanced column and the main body of the column.

It was singular with what smoothness the immeasurable machine slid into motion; there was no confusion; western army corps marched first, and then the next in order took up the minuet of nomadism, converging and diverging in rhythmic involution and evolution, like the harmonious currents of a stream, as China began to flow in earnest. In the week, on the day, at the hour that Yen How designed, they moved, they passed away.

Through all that breadth of Thibet between the Himalayas and the Kuen-luns, on a level equal to the height of Mount Blanc, they came pouring and blundering ponderously, fifty army corps of them, some almost abreast, separated only by short intervals of twenty or thirty miles, a hundred millions of them, and behind each man a pigtail wriggling in haste.

Toward what do they press? What vague blessedness? They do not know. They do not ask. When the Pied Piper played his tune, all the rats of all the cities went gaily in haste after him, entranced; they, too, with wriggling tail, and whiskers cocked, and vaguest prospect. Yen How is the Piper of these prone, purblind, forward-shouldering multitudes of nations—he himself a dancer to Another piping.

Then, again, along the sources of the Irtush they poured, and, one night, all round the inhospitable steppe-like slopes which surround the lower level of Lake Balkash, there camped another fifty army corps, some within sight of others, making by far the largest collection of human beings covering a similar area which the stars had yet seen. And the next morning, and during all that day and the next, army corps after army corps, they moved, they passed away.



He dropped out of the march like a bird from the flight.

The first (Thibetan) fifty are southern and western tribesmen, used to hard industry, short of stature, their skin a clear yellow, almost of lemon. They are from furthest Taiwan, from Fo-kien to Yun-nan, and from Kwang-tung to Ho-nan; and they pass between the sources of the Yang-tse-kiang and the Mekong, and between the Hwang-ho and the source of the Kia-ling, climbing to the flat roof of the world through colossal forests bordering on eternal snows, where glaciers and masses of angry water tear and pierce the mountains, forming natural routes through the impassable. By the time they reach the high tableland of many rains and rushing rivers and abounding lakes, they find silent villages and deserted groves of the mulberry. The Thibetans have already passed away. And on through the stripped and empty land they go, shouldering and trundling—a hundred millions—and behind each man wriggles a pigtail in haste.

Then, by the caravan-route which passes from Pekin through the Gobi desert north of the Southern Altais, pass the second (Balkash) fifty. They are Kobdoans, North-western Mongolians (so-called), and tribesmen of the Chinese provinces north of the Hwang-ho (except those of Kan-see, Shen-si, and Pechili); men of a duskier yellow, as of weak-tea-and-milk, tall, and nomads already by instinct and habit, not averse to a further house-flitting—in plenty of company! And these pass the sources of the Irtish to Balkash, and thence go swarming down into the lowlands and desert places round the Aral Sea, where Russia had so sweated and striven in vain. Across the Caspian they will follow, at the right hour, the pioneering (Thibetan) fifty.

Then there are ten corps (the smallest of the four great branches), which, one by one, take the caravan-route passing from Pekin north of the bleak and bare Tuen-luns through all that rich agricultural region—an oasis in a land of barrenness—which is traversed by the Tarim river, beginning at Lob Nov, and ending beyond Kashgar. They are from the teeming provinces of Kan-su and Shen-si—twenty millions—and behind each man wriggles a pigtail in haste.

But the fourth main branch—Pe-chi-li, Korea, Kirim, Manchuria, Eastern Mongolia—tarry long behind; for these are to travel swiftly, and in luxury—in Western-civilisation railway-trains! Not till the last moment before mobilisation is the Russian garrison at Vladivostok shelled from the sea by Japanese ships, and Vladivostok itself seized from land by Chinese soldiers. From Vladivostok runs a railway to Petersburgh; and outside Vladivostok harbour, while the shelling of the forts is proceeding, waits a large fleet of merchant-ships crowded with many thousands of large-grade railway-carriages, such as are required by the Russian lines, manufactured all at Nagasaki. And so to Vladivostok come the thirty Western corps, the sixty millions, the fourth great torrent of that disemboguing Nile. And as the crowded train moves out westward from the station, a shocking shrill scream of glee and terror from two thousand throats—the shrill glee and terror of a child in its first swing—fills all the air. It is "the Chinese scream."

But how great a general is the little doctor! This large matter of his, which would have bewildered, and abashed, and appalled the genius of Cæsar or Napoleon, is all clearly perceived and calculated in his intellect of ice. When he thinks of the world-magnitude of it all, he says "Poh!" To God the world is a grain of dust; to Yen How it is a geographical globe: he metes it with a compass; in a moment he walks about it. With what ease and thoroughness has

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his first thought—that thought which could have occurred only to genius—been realised! By a few scratches of his pen, Europe had been prepared to receive him. "*There will be no more Maxims there,*" he had said to Count Ito with screwed-up eyes; and there *are* no more Maxims there, or none worth mentioning. To lead one's troops "along the line of least resistance"—that being the first maxim of the general, how great a general is Yen in first of all creating a line of no resistance along which to lead!

But to guide that restive, rearing four-horse chariot even over the levelest plain, how iron-strong must be the wrist of its Jehu, and how sublime his gallant callousness!

Surprised by a troop of British mounted vedettes and taken prisoner.

This was his general plan: to connect himself telegraphically with his armies, and personally to direct their actions even in the minutest particulars. For the peculiarity of these monstrous hosts was this: that by means of their unimaginable numbers they could, almost without effort, carry out works in a day which no other army could dream of ever accomplishing at all. Thus, the fifty Thibetan corps crossed the Caspian from Krasnovodsk to Baku, with its carts, transport, and stores, on huge towed rafts constructed *within two days* from materials which they carried with them. So also, wherever the first three great branches passed, they were followed by as many lines of telegraph as there were corps, just as a spider is followed by the thread it spins. And in the centre of this web sat Yen How at Pekin.

Such was his general plan. His particular plan was this: that the first line of Europe's defence should be Germany; for with exact foresight he calculated, some months before the battle in the Channel, that, in almost any case, Germany would still have left some of her army corps. Russia he meant to take by surprise; the Balkan Peninsula by surprise; and both, he calculated, would be incapable of serious opposition.

Into Russia he would pour the sixty millions who went screaming along the Vladivostok railway; into the Balkan Peninsula sixteen millions of the first (Thibetan) hundred millions. The remaining eighty-four millions of these were to be German, Swiss, and Austrian. The two other branches, numbering altogether a hundred and twenty millions, were to be divided into thirty French, twenty Italian, ten Norwegian and Swedish; and because Holland and Belgium had not been directly ravaged by the war, and Spain only by the American war, he designed for Spain the large number of thirty millions, and for Holland, Belgium, and Denmark thirty millions.

And at Pekin Yen How might have remained, and directed all this with absolute exactness and success, were it not that, at the back of the man's brain, there lay this singular thought: that none of the women of England must be killed!—till he gave the word. And he knew well that no earthly power save his own strong, present, personal grip could restrain his wild hordes, fresh from the gleeful slaughter of Europe, from washing their hands in the blood of every human female in Britain.

Therefore he took train at Vladivostok.

The difference between him and Hardy was chiefly this: that with the race-instinct, and race-hatred, and race-ambition of the Chinaman was mixed a personal, private motive, stronger even than the race-motive. Hardy, *like the very greatest*, was concerned only for his country and for the world.

It is written in the Book of the Law of the Universe that selfishness shall, sooner or later, be a source of weakness. Whoever denies this has not gone deep.

The difference between Hardy and Yen How was the difference being Wellington and Napoleon. The latter, being more richly endowed, should have been the stronger—and was not.

At the time when Yen How took train, there was no longer any country corresponding to what was meant when one said "Russia."

As soon as the first contingent of the first army corps passed through the Urals north of Mount Iremel, its first care was to destroy all telegraphic communication between the locality and western centres. Up to this moment not even a suspicion of what was coming had occurred to anyone on the Continent, for it was not till the day after the first arrival of Chinese, that the two British forces in France and Germany received homeward orders.

On the very day of their arrival, the final battle had been fought in France near Bar-sur-Seine with a French loss of eighteen thousand; and on the same day, the Emperor

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Wilhelm, rashly advancing with his staff and a small reconnoitring party too near the British lines at Landsberg, was suddenly surprised by a troop of British mounted vedettes, and taken prisoner.

But when, on the next day, Lord Roberts invited General Daubisson to a conference, and Sir Evelyn Wood invited the freely-liberated Kaiser, the announcements by the two British generals of their intention of immediate withdrawal, and of its cause, was received with mere amazed incredulity. The blow of the thunderbolt was stupifying. The Continental leaders did not fall to their knees and beseech the presence and aid of their British invaders; there are tidings too large to find for themselves room in the brain.

But even while the two conferences were proceeding, what was to become known as the "Yellow Terror" was already abroad—and fifty thousand Chinese had settled in fifteen or twenty Ural villages, whose streets were strewn with dead.

And almost as fast as the news could spread westward, the Chinese spread westward also.

It was the strangest army of occupation. As soon as an army corps entered upon Russian territory it scattered and vanished; it split up into divisions, and one division went one way and one another; and divisions split up into brigades, and one brigade went one way and one another; and so the sub-division went on, every regiment, every company, having its town or village allotted to it by long-previous design. By the time the first contingents of the second corps had crossed the Volga at Syzran, there were probably not a thousand Russians left alive anywhere between Perm and Astrakhan.

There was no fighting. Those that could fly or hide, fled or hid. The rest heard "the Chinese scream," and died. For every one that died two screams went to Heaven; the scream of the victim and the scream of his slayer.

Then spread "the Yellow Terror"; at first slowly, then with the wings of the lightning.

In old Saxon times mothers frightened their crying babes with the swiftly whispered words: "The Danes are coming!" So say, or used to say, the history books. But the panic-horror with which Europe in a few days learnt to receive the simple announcement: "*The Chinese are coming!*" had no sort of resemblance, in its unutterable awesomeness, in its supernatural affright, to any previous terror experienced by men.

The Black Death of the middle ages, which nearly altogether emptied Europe, inspired no doubt an equally agic *suggestion*, but it probably failed in something of that staring, pallid, dry-throated *panic* characteristic of the Yellow Terror, chiefly on account of the element of the unknown and wholly novel in the Chinese cataclysm, on account, also, of the *certainty* of his doom which pierced the heart of each European, and on account, thirdly, of certain hints of unutterable horror which accompanied the rumours of the onward sweep of the yellow wave.

The reign of hell on earth which had followed upon some Japanese victories during the Chino-Japanese war was well known in Europe. If China had fared so at the hand of Japan, how would Europe fare at the hand of China led by Japan . . . ?

Lamentation and a voice in Ramah, and a widening, running shriek, swelling into a cry of such volume and intensity as had never yet risen from earth to the throne of Heaven, marked the middle of the month of August in Europe.

Then came to pass, even to the utmost, that vision in the Apocalypse of the poet: "Woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth . . . "

Among the millions that rushed westward in plague-striken panic and frenzied selfishness was the famous duellist Edrapol, who happened to be then at Crackow.

He made straight for Paris; and on arriving at the hotel in the avenue Wagram where he always stayed, he found awaiting him this letter:

SIR,—As I promised you, I am writing to seek you out for the purpose of the little duel to which you challenged me, the European war being now at an end. I confess to you that this duel of yours and mine seems to me a very absurd thing; but still, a bargain is a bargain. I am in a low state of health at present, and quite unable to come to you, even if I knew where you are to be found. But I write instead, so as to be able to say I did not altogether break my word, and am getting the letter to you at considerable personal trouble. I hope you will receive it, and send me, when you can, a reply.

I am, sir,
Your servant,
JOHN HARDY.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WEAK POINT.

DURING the first part of that memorable Week of accountable, yet strange Night, when the darkened sun and the quaking crust of the earth seemed to the affrighted imagination of men surely to portend the coming of the great and dreadful day of the wrath of God, John Hardy's agents were hot on the trail of the young woman whom he sought.

The scream of the victim and the scream of his slayer.

Three weeks previous to the week of darkness, the old butler had brought him a list of the men left in hospital of the Duke of Cambridge's Own regiment, and as Hardy's eye ran down the list, he saw a name which he had heard, which was on the tip of his memory, yet which he had been unable to remember. His eye lit up at the sight of it. It was the name of the soldier John Brabant.

There was nothing miraculous in the fact that Brabant still lived; yet to Hardy it seemed nothing less than a genuine miracle. Faith in the Divine formed the groundwork and rock-bed of his simple nature; and his eye continually searched for, and assumed the stealthy, busy Finger.

A day after receiving the list he was able to leave his bed, and at once he hurried, muffled up in wrappers in a close carriage, to the Chelsea Hospital, and the bed-side of Brabant.

Brabant, as it happened, was slowly dying from exhaustion as the result of an amputation, and did, in fact, die a few days later. He was, however, in his senses, and able to give to Hardy the address of the villa at which the girl Seward had been, or was still (for he was not sure), a servant.

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To Hardy, the one thing of paramount interest in the world seemed to be to have this girl, whose initials he bore branded on his breast, secure in his own keeping. He had the instinct to lock her away in some Castle of absolute safety, and feed her every hour with his own hands, lest chance or change should befall her.

That, at a time when the earth was travailing in death-throes and birth-throes, all should depend, one way or the other, upon a London servant-girl, was not, in reality, unlike the way of Life. Things happen—not "with vigour and rigour," as Mr. Matthew Arnold very well says, but in that fast-and-loose fashion. When Fate is not freakish, she is unlike herself. The unprecedented is the natural, and may be counted upon. Destiny is full of novelties.

That a nerve in this particular girl should set a nerve in Yen How a-tingling, and that Yen How's tingling, spreading out beyond all limit into transcendental rapture, should infect a whole planet with tingling,—this was nothing more than the launching of a battle-ship by the pressure of an electric button, or the loosening of an avalanche by the rolling of a pebble. In such surprises both Fate and Nature abound.

But Ada Seward was no longer at the Pattison villa; all the information which could be gathered there was the fact that she had a brother, a bicycle-smith, residing in Church Road, Chelsea, to whom she may have gone after suddenly leaving the Pattisons. But the brother declared that she was not there; and either he could not, or would not, give any further details about Ada to the agents employed by Hardy.

It became clear that about the girl and her movements hung some sort of mystery; that something was being concealed with regard to her.

Hardy commenced to seek her throughout England, advertising in every paper, and setting to work the best detectives.

If she were abroad? If she were dead? And if Yen How knew it—had secret means of knowing it? In that case Hardy had no hope.

He remained in a state of brooding, morbid pensiveness. At night he sat long at table after dinner, drinking much too freely, his right hand on the mouth of the decanter, his left hanging heavy, his head sunk. In this way three weeks passed; and still the girl remained hidden.

Then came the memorable Week of Darkness.

At this time the wild flood of migration from the Continent was in full sweep. England had risen nobly to Hardy's summons to offer herself as the City of Refuge to the ill-fated peoples of Europe, and had opened to them her large and pitying bosom, as a mother folds her terrified child.

The merchant marines of all the still unswamped nations, with the whole available merchant marine of Britain, were engaged in the continual task of deportation.

But like "the pious pelican" which feeds her young with the blood of her own torn breast, England fed the stranger with her own life.

The famine grew sore in the land, even though the self-governing colonies, at the first warning of the facts, set stoutly to work to meet the demands upon their feeding powers.

In Britain itself, quite suddenly, there sprang into being the visible germs of a real Socialism. The necessities of the human race no longer admitted of quibbling and compromise with the root facts of life and the root laws of God. It had been the custom before the war to say, in a phrase so generally accepted that it had passed into an axiom, that England "*could not feed herself.*" The wild fancifulness of this assertion (which might bring a smile to the lips of even a child who seriously thinks of it) may be seen from the arithmetical fact that England (or any other ordinary piece of land of similar size) can feed, not only herself, but almost the entire population of the globe—under right and natural conditions of life. For if a man, or a child, unhampered by artificial customs, will set to work with a spade and a hoe upon the ground, it is a fact that a very small piece of fertile land—something like the tenth of an acre—will supply him not only with food to keep him continually munching, but with so much more than he can eat himself, that he shall have enough left over to give in exchange to someone else who has spent his time in making boots and clothes, and wishes to sell these in exchange for the surplus corn or carrots grown by the first man. Now, on the broad bosom of Britain, which is not niggardly, but rich in alimentary bounty, there are 790,000,000 of such pieces of land; and 790,000,000 is much the larger portion of the population of the earth.

England, therefore, if she be properly governed, can quite surely feed not only herself, but the rest of mankind as well.

This had been the "open secret" of social life, preached through many a century by the single-eyed great ones—with their simple and discerning wit! But it needed nothing less than the inexorable compulsion of Destiny to teach it clearly, once and for all, to the whole race.

Meantime, in the absence of regulations, which involve time for their accomplishment, the rich men and the not-poor men of Britain came nobly forward with proffered purse to the perishing millions.

But from the West, from across the Atlantic, there came to Britain a shock almost as horrifying as the vague rumours of the reign of Terror then going forward eastward on the Continent.

America, crowded with ten thousand Christian churches, refused to receive the fugitives from Europe.

This shocking inhumanity had for its excuse an objection to be swamped by "a pauper immigration."

England, now the one great Mother of the world, pondered this thing in her heart—and never forgave it.

John Hardy's proposal of a League between Britain and the United States had ended in a fiasco. An attempt had at once been made by the British Government to carry the proposal into effect. America had accepted the idea; but as soon as it came to a question of detail, of the making of sacrifices, Mammon, "the least erect" of all the spirits, drew back into selfish aloofness.

Meanwhile, the only possible defensive measure against the Yellow Wave on the part of England was an intense activity at Chiswick, at Jarrow, at Chatham, at Birkenhead, at Sheerness, at Portsmouth, at Paisley, at Glasgow, at Newcastle, at Pembroke, at Sunderland, in every government, in every private dockyard. Thousands of men were requisitioned from remotely allied trades to aid in the agonised work of building, building, building. But Hardy, for one, smiled at the idea that Yen How was going to be simple enough to allow Britain time to build ships to beat him.

He, for his part, had set going another activity, equally eager, and more to the point.

By direct suggestion to the First Lord of the Admiralty, he had singled out the men of the Royal Naval Artillery Volunteers as the nucleus of force which must now become the hope of Britain.

Though there was hardly any longer a Royal Naval body of men, there still remained a Royal Naval Reserve in considerable numbers; when therefore Hardy designated the Artillery Volunteers, Mr. Goschen, who alone was in the secret of his plans, expressed surprise.

Hardy, however, persisted; and the next day, by proclamation, the members of the force were requisitioned for service. At the same time a large additional number of volunteers sent in their names to the commanding officers of the stationary drill-ships.

The members of this force, which had always, since its formation by special Act in 1873, formed one of the most exclusive clubs in the world, consisted only of professional and business men, doctors, bank-clerks, solicitors, stock-

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brokers, authors, who had regularly left the desk, or the consulting-room, or the office, to attend at least twice a month at gun, rifle, pistol and cutlass drill, until they attained the standard of "efficients," men who had cast off the orchided frock coat, completely sinking their social position, to put on the blue working-dress of the simple blue-jacket on the yearly cruises in the gun-boat, or the Saturday-to-Monday cruise in the seamanship-practice schooner. These men, belonging exclusively to the great middle class, represented the very essence of the mood of England. And it was with them alone that Hardy proposed to set up the first, and perhaps the last, dam to the flowing Yellow Wave.

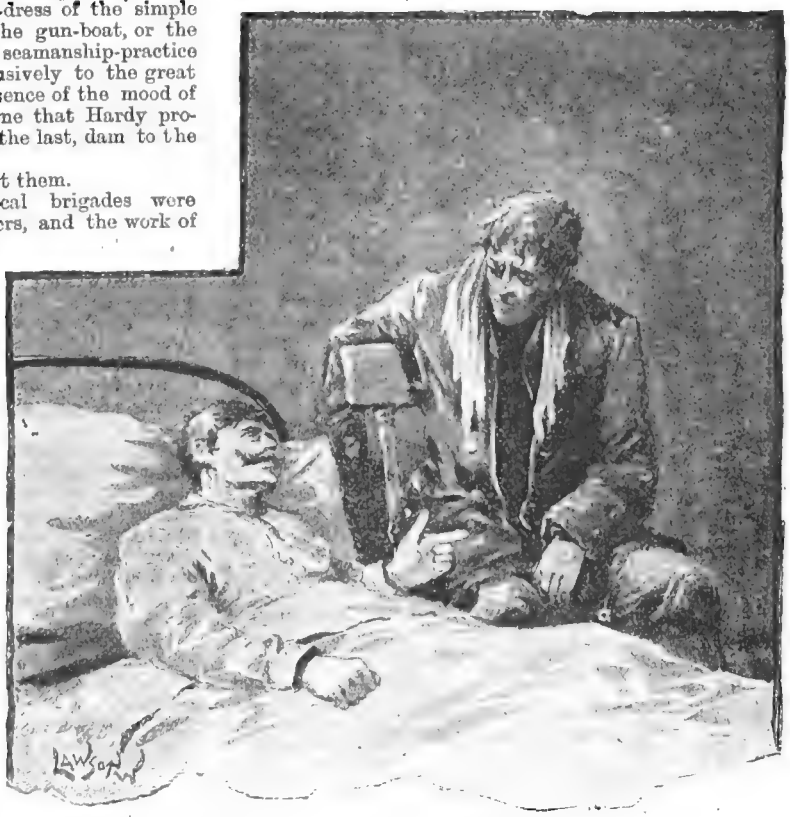
He wanted 4,000 of them; and he got them.

The various drill-ships of the local brigades were assembled at Portsmouth with tenders, and the work of drilling and instruction went forward with unremitting zeal, the 4,000 and odd gentlemen who composed this strange force subjecting themselves to the most grinding discipline, sleeping in hammocks, swabbing decks, cooking food, and cleaning guns; opening, above all, their already trained minds to the art of fighting on moving water.

But when they asked one another *why* they were doing all this, there was no forthcoming answer. There certainly were the men, but where were the ships?

Hardy, in his jealousy lest his ships might be used for purposes at all other than those for which he purposed them, had kept his secret well. They were to him like buried gold to the miser. He gloated inwardly over the thought of them, over the loud language he would make them talk when that great hour came.

Meantime, he sat brooding often, sometimes desperately ill, sometimes with his hand resting for hours on the mouth of the decanter, his sunken head crowded with the busy fumes of wine.



He hurried . . . to the bedside of Brabant.

And as he sat so one night—it was the Tuesday of the Week of Darkness—something spurred within him, and he sprang to his feet, and took his cap, and went out into the stifling dark air.

His once gentle heart, though embittered and desperate, was not wholly dead. Under this sudden impulse, wine-inspired, he jumped into a cab and drove to Park Lane.

He stopped at the door of Miss Jay. He had now been several weeks in England, yet had not seen her. Why he now went he did not ask himself: some vague motive worked in him to insult, or press, or smite her in the face,—such was the tragic desperation of his empty and callous heart.

Love, tenderness, were far from him now; yet in the depths of his nature some ungovernable cry in the dark, some fierce yearning perhaps, spurred him toward the sister of his soul: such subterranean throes occur in the dim places of the hearts of men.

Her carriage drove up to the door as he entered it, and he found her in evening dress in the drawing-room, cutting the leaves of a book. War, and eclipse, and the overthrow of the world, seemed to leave untouched the reposeful tenor of this very-modern young lady's life.

Here was the "*morgue britannique*" in its very ultimate demonstration.

"You are well again, then, Mr. Hardy?" she said, giving him her hand, "I am so glad!"

"Well or not, I am come to see you, you see."

He threw his cap one way and himself another, and looked gloomily at her.

She, for her part, was shocked—at his aged eyes, his wild aspect, the quite visible grey in his hair. Now, at least she recognised a man, and a master of men.

For minutes of inward reflection there was silence between them. He said:

"I told you I would come again, and come I am."

Her heart bounded. She answered: "Yes."

"Have you got over all that about Art?" This he asked with a momentary gentle smile.

"No—not got over it"—the irony in her leaping up, and smothering the pity: "not yet. A weakness of that sort clings so to one. In the absence of a sun, one works by lamp-light—which is all that remains."

"Well, I see you are still a mocker. But one cannot always go on mocking."

"No, no. I do not mean, really, to mock at anything. In reality, I am very sorry, and sad, at everything."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I believe that, too. At bottom you are good and kind."

"I hope so."

"That was why I came to see you now. Heaven only knows why I came. You ought to have married me when I told you."

"Oh, as to *that*—" she said.

"No, no, do not begin that again!" he retorted fretfully. "Can't you guess that I am changed in mood, and everything? All that is not for me any more."

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Somehow her heart sank; and the sadness of autumnal winds sighing among dead leaves smote its chords. So wild a pity is in the world, and so bitter a sob.

She said:

"I can see that you are changed, yes; and I divine that you are far from happy. What has been the matter?"

"Why should I tell *you?*"

"There is no reason in the world, Mr. Hardy."

"You see, that is the way you talk to me!" he said, regarding her fixedly under his eyes: "soon, when I am gone, you will be saying to yourself, 'Well, it was bitter of me not to love and comfort poor John Hardy in his misery.'"

"Gone?" she questioned,—"gone where to?"

"Gone to God"—and in a lower tone—"gone to Hell."

And now she rose, and in haste went to sit beside him. And the pity of ministering angels was in her voice.

A private detective was ushered into his presence.

"Tell me," she said, "for you have come to me feeling that I am your good friend, and you should tell me."

"Ah, it is nothing," he said, and he flung himself backwards on the sofa where he sat.

"It must be very much, since it has affected you so. I heard something . . . . but did not quite realise it. You should—you should have come before."

"Come for what? I tell you it is no good at all any more!"

"But you are too—too despondent. See—you say you want my love and comfort—there is my hand in yours, my friend. If you do not tell me your trouble, that will mean to me that you do not—really—care for me."

"Ah, I did, though! I did!"

"And do—or you would not come. Can't you see that? You do still. So you must open your heart to your friend."

He looked into her eyes, and they swam in tears. His head lying back on the sofa-back rolled from side to side.

"You are a good, kind girl," he said, "and I knew that long ago. I had a kind of power to guess everything that was in you. Why did you not—but it is useless talking now. Let me go away."

"No, no—do not say that."

"Well, now, I call you wondrously good."

"Of course I am—*of course.* Can't you divine? I—*naturally*—do not wish you to go. You look so sad—so worn with suffering. Why is that? How is it? Ah! I am so—I could not tell you. But you—tell *me*, for I beg you, all your trouble."

"Well, well. . . . But to what end?"

"Because *I* ask you: and because I feel that it will do you good to tell me."

She ought to have said "because it will redeem you, and save you to tell me"; for that was the truth.

And, indeed, an impulse did then rise in John Hardy to tell to *her* at least that history which he was hoarding and hugging venomously in his breast, which he had breathed to no living soul, save in one short sentence to old Bobbie Mason; the history of those long tortures—how the scream of a cat had been rent from his twisting and beastialised soul—how he had cursed the deaf ears of Heaven—how, now, his poor nerves, tingling in a chaos of jangling dissonance, like the wires of some shattered instrument of music, represented all the universe to him as a mere black nightmare crowded with sighing winds and unutterable, dismal shapes of woe—how, above all, his passion for vengeance had settled within him into the cruel and wicked malice of a fiend.

He had the impulse to tell it all out, and save his soul. And he said:

"Well—I will tell you—if your ears can bear it. You know, do you not, that I went to China—but no, no, no! I am not a child, Miss Jay! do let me get away—!"

And suddenly, he had snatched his hand from hers, had sprung up, and was gone almost before the cry had leapt from her lips.

And she, for a long time, sat staring vacantly at the floor, and did not go out that evening.

During that (Tuesday) night, the Japanese fleet, just arrived in Europe, appeared in twos and threes along the south-east coast. On Wednesday morning, England heard the news that Hastings, Brighton, Worthing, and so on all along to Bognor, had been reduced to heaps of broken stone, some seven hundred people having been killed.

That was on the Tuesday. On the Wednesday evening Hardy received a small wooden box, bearing the direction: "John Hardy, England." It bore no stamps, and had evidently been brought from its origin "by hand."

On opening it, he found a quantity of paper stuffing; and, this being removed, a dry and shrivelled, but still evil-smelling object, upon which had been stuck a small oblong piece of paper. On the paper were three lines of tiny, neat writing; and the words written were these:

"From Yen How to John Hardy.

"Heart of His Royal Highness Prince Heinrich of Hesse."

Prince Heinrich of Hesse, as Hardy knew, was a young child of eight.

Even while Hardy sat contemplating this object, a private detective was ushered into his presence. He came to say that, at last, by means of a confession of her brother, he had been able to trace the whereabouts of the girl Seaward.

(To be continued.)

U.S.A. v. SPAIN.

For the first time in the history of British journalism a serial story of a war is running concurrently with the actual fighting.

This story is entitled

"Contraband of War,"

and has just started in *Pearson's Weekly.*

Get a copy at once; you will not regret it. A concise summary will enable you to start right away.

Pearson's Weekly is published every Saturday, and costs one penny.

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GREAT - WAR - COMPETITION.

FIRST PRIZE . . £5 | **25 Prizes of Handsome Books.**
Five Prizes of £1 each. | **25 Gold-plated Pencil-cases.**

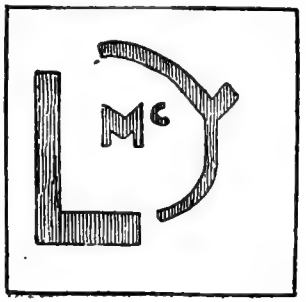
In the event of a tie, the prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

SO much interest is at the present moment centred in that part of the world round the unfortunate Island of Cuba, that the competition we have inaugurated, and which started last week, should commend itself particularly to readers of *Short Stories*.

Below will be found eight pictures. Each one depicts the name of some place, or ship, or man associated with the combatants. Five sets of these pictures will be published. Write down the names in the spaces provided, and keep all the sets by you until we ask you to send them in.

The daily newspapers will give you the best help in discovering solutions, as most of the names depicted have already appeared in the press.

PERSON.



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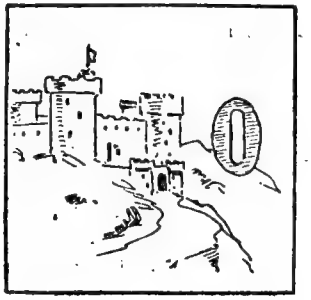
WARSHIP.



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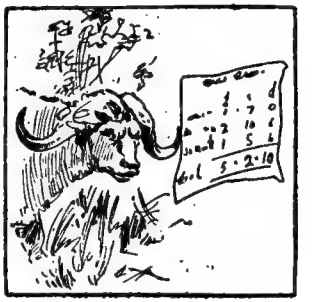
PERSON.



No. 11.....

WARSHIP.

No. 12.....

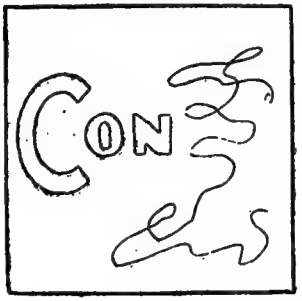
PLACE.

No. 13.....

WARSHIP.

No. 14.....

WARSHIP



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WAR COMPETITION.

No. 2.

Name.....

Address.....

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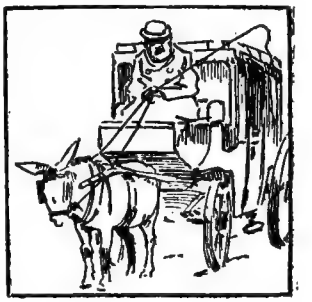
PLACE.



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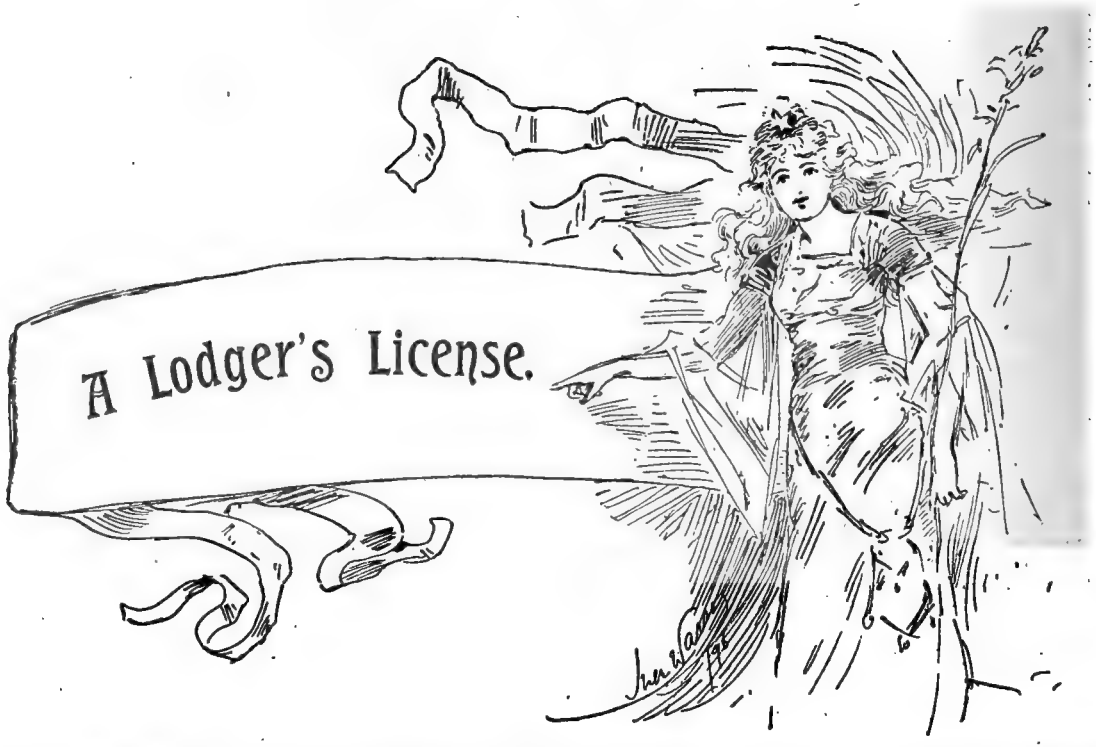

I was disgustingly late. A clock somewhere behind the Museum struck three as I came round the corner of the square. The one wedge of light thrown on the spectre trees was my reproach. It came, undoubtedly, from the third floor window of number thirty-one.

And from the second floor! I noticed this as I reached the steps and laughed softly. So after all I was not the only one. Besides, the other man would have someone waiting up for him. I knew this because he was newly married, had only been married a few weeks.

I felt sorry for the man. I had never seen him, did not even know his name. But to come home at three in the morning and find someone sitting up for you was horrible.

"Poor beggar," I said.

Something made me glance up towards the lighted window on the second floor. The shadow of a woman was thrown distinctly on the blind. It was the shadow, one knew instinctively, of a pretty woman.

Instinctively—yet for my part I was not dependent on instinct. It was possible for me, presumptious, but possible, to fill in the pretty profile with unquestionable precision.

Smoking my pipe at the window I had often watched that tiny figure emerge from the house, enter the square by the rusty iron gate, and pace up and down the prim gravel path waiting for *his* return. Once I had been indiscreet enough to cough in the hope that she might look up. A flirtation from a fourth floor window might have led to anything.

But a fourth floor window is a long way up. The cough miscarried, solicited an old clothes man, brought him to the door, kept him there arguing with the landlady, insisting that I had called him, wanted to see him, and that he wasn't going away until he had seen me.

By this time I had found the latch.

It was perfectly dark as I closed the door behind me. I never knew before what a long way it was along that hallway, or what a lot of things, perambulators chiefly, I fancy, were used in the furnishing.

I hoped that the other man might not come in until I was safely aloft. In doing so he might bring about a scuffle in the dark before discovering that we had an equal right to the stairs.

The first floor at last! I began to mount circumspectly. I knew nothing of married life, but I thought if she were waiting for him with a water jug.——

In spite of my caution, the door opened as I went by.

"I beg your pardon," I said quickly. "It's——"

The door closed softly but rapidly; I fancied I heard a sigh. I am quite sure I heard one. Perhaps she had had no intention of throwing water-jugs about. Perhaps—I recalled many instances in which a mistake like that had been made in the dark. Pooh!

I made up my mind to get married: began to anathmatise the other man.

"The brute," I said.

I could hear footsteps down below; every now and then the swish of a skirt.

She was pacing up and down, growing anxious, What in the world did the man mean by it—if a man can't come home at decent hours when he is married and to such a pretty woman as——

Certainly she was pretty, and undoubtedly jolly. Girls with crumply hair and blue eyes and big laughing mouths are invariably jolly. Probably wouldn't be hard to entertain. With such a girl as that I could get on famously.

I looked at my watch. It was, in fact, nearly half-past-three, and still that pacing down below continued. It got on my nerves; when a woman gets on my nerves I invariably grow impolite.

"Little fool," I said. "Why doesn't she go to bed?"

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Perhaps she was frightened that something had happened to that reprobate husband of hers. I had half a mind to call to her over the banisters and tell her not to be ridiculous. It was useless for her to sit up.

And if she would sit up—why, she might just as well come and entertain me.

For my own part I had no inclination to go to bed. I lit a cigarette and waited.

I cannot say what put the idea into my head, but it certainly crossed my mind more than once that it was a pity we could not entertain one another until the missing man chose to return. To conform with the proprieties we might sit on the stairs. I pictured her to myself, however, sitting in the arm-chair opposite. I imagined how she would look with the soft glow of the tall lamp falling on her. With my mind filled with this delicious reverie I was, in fact, already carrying on an imaginary conversation with my visitor.

The door down below opened softly.

I rose from my chair, and crossing over to my own door, opened it. She might just as well know that I was not asleep in case—well it was possible that she might be frightened, might be glad to consult with someone; just talking will help to pass away the time.

Yet I confess that surprise made my breath come a little faster when a moment later I heard her foot on the stairs.

She hesitated half way up, then came on resolutely and knocked at the door.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Please do," I said.

She was perfectly self-possessed seemingly. And yet somehow I fancied that this appearance was due to extreme embarrassment. She bowed formally; hesitated; threw a half glance over her shoulder.

"I am afraid you'll thing it very strange of me coming up in this unceremonious way," she said, and blushed. She began rushing her words; anxious to say something, suddenly her nerve gave way, she stopped, and blushed.

I hastened to put her at her ease.

"I think it is very kind of you," I said. "Your husband is late, but I am sure there is no need for anxiety. If I can do anything for you——"

"That is just—" Her courage seemed to ooze away again. "My husband has not yet come back. It's most extraordinary. He is always in long before this—and I am dreadfully tired."

"He cannot be much longer," I said. Secretly I hoped he would be. It was not at all unpleasant to act as comforter in his absence.

"You will find that chair very comfortable," I said with a little wave of invitation.

"Oh, but I can't stop," she said. "I only came up ——" She came a step nearer and laughed nervously.

"Have you any sisters?" she asked.

"Lots," I answered encouragingly.

"Then—" She looked at me closely. "Grown-up ones?" she asked sharply.

"No—short frocks and pretty governesses," I said.

I suppose she thought this flippant; her face fell dismally, and she took a pace back. And then the devil got into me.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I would have grown-up ones if I could. I would do anything if I thought it would please you. I—pretty governesses are just the same experience as grown-up sisters," I said.

"You don't understand," she said.

"Then teach me to understand."

She stood with her head a little on one side tantalisingly. "It's so ridiculous," she said.

"Seems ridiculous," I admitted, "but in reality—dead earnest."

"Yes," she said.

I went a little nearer. Events were hurrying.

"You don't think it very strange of me," she said. "You understand?"

"Perfectly—of course," I said. "Under the same circumstances."

"So you appreciate the circumstances——?"

"Perfectly," said I.

I went a little nearer, and as I did so she turned away.

I took her hands into mine from behind. She snatched them away violently—furiously. My lips just touched her hair.

"How dare you!" she cried. Her face flamed, a taut look came into her eyes.

I heard the front door open and shut again.

With a little cry she darted across the room.

That door opening and closing again appeared to have an extraordinary effect upon her. All her composure returned. At the door she even waited to throw me a little mocking courtesy.

"Look here," I said hurriedly.

"Well?"

She stood with one hand on the door handle listening to me and to the footsteps on the stairs.

"You are not angry with me? You——"

"Misunderstood me," she said.

The look in her blue eyes emboldened me.

"Well, what did you want?" I said defiantly.

The footsteps were coming every moment nearer.

"I wanted my bodice unlaced behind, of course," she said, and flaunted out of the room.

I was never more surprised in my life.

MERRIDEN HOWARD.

A Novel Competition.

THE proprietors of Nixey's Black Lead and Cervus Flannelette Bag Blue, offer £5 in prizes for competition on the following conditions:

Eight prizes: £2, £1, two of 10s., and four of 5s., for the best poem or experiences in the use of Nixey's Black Lead and Blue.

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Contributions to be sent in before May 31st, 1898, addressed, Black Lead and Bag Blue Competition, care of W. G. NIXEY, 12 Soho Square, W., and mentioning *Short Stories*.

Why is your Nose in the Middle of your Face?

IF you can correctly answer this all-absorbing question, together with others that are appearing within the next few weeks in *Pearson's Weekly*, you stand a very good chance of scooping in £50, which is the first prize offered in a Big Conundrum Competition. Altogether there will be thirty of such conundrums, and £100 will be divided amongst those who answer them most correctly.

WHY IS YOUR NOSE IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR FACE?

Come now, can't you guess? If not, ask the next friend you meet. Perhaps he or she will be able to help you.

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THE RIVAL QUEENS.

A TALE OF OLD FRANCE RETOLD FROM THE FRENCH BY MARY FERMOR.

CHAPTER XXI.

In the Lord Abbot's Cellar.

Travellers who wish to form a correct estimate of the political condition of a country without the trouble of reading the newspapers and making the deductions necessary after such reading, would do well to observe the noses of the statues adorning the public buildings and squares. If the noses are in good condition, then the ship of state is sailing in calm water; but if marks of violence and mutilation are to be seen, it may be safely asserted that the land has passed through troublous times.

On the day following the attack on the Abbey St. Martin, there was comparatively little evidence of the horrible scene that had been enacted there. A certain portion of the outlying buildings lay in blackened ruins, it is true; shutters had been torn from several windows, and the costly hangings in the chapel had been dragged down and trampled under foot; but all these were matters that could easily be set right, and things would have looked much the same as ever in a few days, if it had not been for the mournful and grotesque appearance presented by the many figures of saints which adorned every room and corridor. Not a nose had been left to the holy men of old! Some of the statues had been nearly demolished, others had been chipped and scarred, but one and all had been ruthlessly deprived of their most prominent feature!

As soon as the Abbey had been cleared of the marauders, the wounded were cared for and the dead prepared for burial. Many were found to have fallen in the fray, monks had been trampled to death or struck down by the brutal mob, archers and tramps had fallen in deadly conflict, more had been cut down by the royal troops. The body of Tristan de Pamiers was claimed by his student subjects and was honoured by a stately funeral.

Prior Anselm celebrated a solemn mass for the departed, and then all at the Abbey resumed its usual course.

The one department which had suffered irreparable loss, in addition to the stone saints, was the wine cellar. The door had been forced by the thirsty throng early in the proceedings, and the casks of choice wines had been rifled, the contents had been poured like water down the insatiable throats of those who had never tasted the like before, and never would again.

When the underground premises had been cleared of belated revellers, and the remainder of the wine laid down with all due care, a thorough search was set on foot by the Prior, to discover the fate of the Queen. Every nook and corner of the Abbey had been carefully investigated without result, and now the only hope was that she might have fled to the cellars to take refuge in the dark.

They called the name of Ingeburge through all the subterranean vaults and passages, they took torches into every dark recess, but in vain. Not a trace of the Queen could be discovered!

The only small comfort left to Anselm was that her body had not been among the slain, but how did he know that a worse fate had overtaken her? Amongst the archers and more ignorant of the brotherhood, the belief gained credence that the mock invalid who had gained

Prior Anselm sadly turned towards this last resource.

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admittance by fraud, was the enemy of mankind in person, who had carried her off under the disguise of Jean Cador, the carver of images.

There only remained one place where search had not been made, and that was the Lord Abbot's private cellar, which opened out of the last vault. This place contained a special store of the choicest vintage and was only opened when the Abbot paid a visit to his Abbey, as he took care to keep the key himself.

Prior Anselm sadly turned towards this last resource, and tried the door, but it resisted every effort, so he came away in despair, saying:

"No one has gone in there!"

A lay brother shot the bolt across the door and the little band withdrew, feeling sad indeed, for the Queen had endeared herself to all who had come in contact with her during her stay amongst them.

As soon as the sound of their retreating footsteps had died away, under the low roof, a distinct noise, as of stifled laughter came from the Abbot's cellar. Three voices were distinguishable, and it was not the mad mirth of maniacs but the suppressed merriment of men who were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Behind that door were three men, and it was they who had succes-fully baffled the Prior's attempts to open it. When one of them lighted a torch, the well-known features of Ezekiel, Tréfouilloux, and "Poor Louise" were recognisable in the uncertain light.

The last-named, who had been left for dead on the floor of the cell by the soldiers when they carried away the wounded, speedily took advantage of his solitude to make off in the direction of the cellars. Here he fell in with his two rivals, who had no heart for fighting when it involved personal risk. To explain how "Poor Louise" had survived the deadly thrust from Eric's dagger it will be necessary to go back to his quest in the monastery.

When he was exploring the deserted cells, any one who had had time to notice him would have observed that in proportion as his search was prolonged his bodily dimensions increased. Nature had been bountiful to him in the first instance, but this rapid development of corpulence was due solely to art—the art of acquisition. "Poor Louise" participated in the common weakness of the sex he counterfeited, and could not resist the temptation of white, finely-spun linen, so that in each cell he entered, he managed to annex something. A sheet, no matter whether it covered a sick man or a corpse was not to be passed over, shirts, towels, anything he could lay hands on, were quickly stuffed inside his capacious garments.

It was into this ample breast-plate of stolen goods that Eric's dagger entered, and "Poor Louise," who was no fool, saw that the game was up for the present, and that it would be the better part of valour to lie low.

By dint of long and continued efforts, these three doughty warriors had managed to burst open the door of the private cellar, and had taken great pains to secure themselves from all interruption. Their investigation of the contents of their hiding-place gave them unmixed satisfaction, and Tréfouilloux had made a nice calculation that, provided they were undisturbed, they could drink on for the next two years without the supply running short. The only drawback was that they had nothing to eat, but that was a small matter, for they knew that when a man is drunk he wants but little solid food, and they meant to be drunk for months to come!

"Oh, good luck!" said Tréfouilloux, "what a change this is from the gutter outside Nôtre Dame! Mates, this is something like a life!"

"We shall not have the sun scorching our heads," added Ezekiel.

"Nor the cold rain and sleet to freeze the marrow in our bones!" chimed in "Poor Louise."

They struggled to their feet and clinked the huge flagons which were serving them as drinking-cups, before emptying them to their new-found happiness.

Clinked the huge flagons.

There was almost an element of solemnity in their joy Their wildest dreams had never pictured such a scene as this! To have wine from morning till night, only for the trouble of pouring it out! Warmth! Shelter! Drink and Idleness! Truly a veritable beggars' Paradise!

"When they come to fetch wine for the Abbot, we must hide in the empty casks," said Tréfouilloux prudently.

"Ah, that greedy old monk will be drinking half our store! I'd forgotten him," grumbled "Poor Louise."

The other two laughed and proposed all kinds of ways by which they might deprive the holy Father of his costly nectar.

"Bah!" cried Ezekiel in a fit of generosity, "we must all drink!"

"Look here," began Tréfouilloux, after a moment's reflection, "we can tell all sorts of tales of our adventures by sea and land when we go back to Nôtre Dame, now's the time to invent our stories."

"When we go back——" began Ezekiel.

"There's time enough for that," broke in "Poor Louise," who was feeling the pangs of hunger. "Have either of you got an old crust of bread in your pockets?"

"Bread?" cried the others scornfully, "what do you want that stuff for?"

"To eat, of course."

Words were inadequate to express the contempt with which this simple answer was greeted. They shrugged their shoulders in disdain and turned away to fetch more wine.

"Look here, mates, if you're no hungry, you soon will be. Perhaps you've had food later than I have, but I've tasted nothing since the night before last, and I feel as if a rat were gnawing me here," and he laid his hand upon where his supper ought to have been.

"If you're hungry, why don't you drink, man?" said Tréfouilloux.

"The fool!" snorted Ezekiel, "to talk about an empty stomach in a sea of wine!"

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"Poor Louise," wishing to fortify himself against the pangs he knew so well, took their advice and drank off a long draught of strong wine; but scarcely had he swallowed it than he sank writhing on the floor, moaning:

"I'm burning! Burning like fire!"

For some time they watched him in his agonies, and wondered what was the matter with him, but after continued libations they began to feel a sense of discomfort similar to that which he described by his intermittent wails; "I'm burning! I'm on fire!"

"I begin to feel horribly hot inside!" gasped Ezekiel at last.

"I feel as if I'd swallowed a red-hot plate of iron!" retorted Tréfouilloux in torture.

The whole scene was changed. All gaiety had fled, and three pale, haggard faces looked with horror on the well-filled casks that had been their joy a short time before. They shrank from the luscious wine as if it had been poison, and from their parched lips went up the cry: "It burns, burns like Hades itself!"

They would have given the whole cellar-full of wine for one draught of water, the thing they had drunk the least of in their lives.

"How dark this hole is! I'm choked," panted Tréfouilloux. "Oh, for the sun and air at Nôtre Dame again!"

"And good rain, too," sighed "Poor Louise," "I'd drink every drop I could!"

"I said, 'when we got back to Nôtre Dame,' just now mates, but perhaps—who knows—we may never get back there again," sobbed Tréfouilloux dismally.

At this awful suggestion they all three scrambled to their feet and tried to open the door, but the bolt on the outer side stood firm, and they sank down exhausted to watch the last flickering gleams of their only remaining torch, with the certainty that their own lives had but little longer to last.

From time to time one or the other groaned out a sigh for former days.

"My snug corner under the wall!" sighed Ezekiel.

"My ulcer! my open wound!" moaned Tréfouilloux.

"My four arms and the goat's hoof!" sobbed "Poor Louise."

The torch gave its last flash and all was dark around them. With strained eyes they watched the spot where last they saw the light, and clutched each other in their panic of despair. Hour after hour wore on only to add to their sufferings. Mad with hunger they groped about for more drink, and then cursed the inward fire it fed so cruelly.

They dashed themselves on the casks and fought like wild beasts in their dark lair. Shrieks, groans, oaths rang from their parched and fevered lips, but no one came to to their aid. Gradually the sounds became fainter and less frequent, then a hoarse rattle, a low, long-drawn moan and a spell of silence. With a yell one of the wretched creatures sprang upon the form nearest to him and died with an oath on his lips—Silence again—a few sobs—and all was still.

* * * * *

Three days later my Lord Abbot elected to dine at the Abbey, so a lay-brother was despatched to fetch the wine. Finding that the lock had been tampered with he returned to tell the Prior, and Anselm went, in some alarm, to investigate the matter. When they opened the door a flood of foul air drove them back, and it was some seconds before they could attempt to enter the cellar again. When they did so, a ghastly sight met their view. Three bodies in an advanced state of decomposition lay within. Two of them were locked in a deadly embrace and the fingers of one were fixed tightly in the throat of the other. Recognition was impossible, so the mystery of the Abbot's cellar remained unsolved. The only clue to the identity of the bodies was the discovery of a neatly folded pile of linen on one of the up-turned casks, and that led to the conclusion that the victims were belonging to the marauders who had plundered the Abbey.

Who they were, and how they got into the private cellar, were questions never answered. Some may have missed the distinguished trio from their wonted places in the inclosure, but we may be sure there were plenty to replace them, and equally certain that there were few, if any, to mourn their loss.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Crystal Poniard.

Paris was in a state of great excitement, and the old Parisians were talking with a volubility not unworthy of their modern descendants; not about political or international affairs, the mysterious assassin, the war with John of England, or the state of the Holy Land, all these were for the time being forgotten, and even the decision of the Ecclesiastical Council was temporarily thrown into the background by the prevailing curiosity as to the fate of Queen Ingeburge.

Various more or less elaborated versions of the riot were in circulation throughout the city, and the same question rose to the lips of every listener, "Who had organised the attack?"

The students of the University protested their ignorance of the whole affair, with the exception of the tragic fate that had overtaken their leader. The Freemasons swore by Holy Writ that they had had neither part nor lot in the act of sacrilege.

Some malicious tongues whispered that the sudden disappearance of Madame Ingeburge fitted in admirably with the personal desires of Philip Augustus, but on the other hand it was the King's troops who had gone to the rescue, even though they were too late to save the Queen. Where was she? Had she been quietly done to death? Or was she being left to languish in some dark dungeon?

Such questions as these occupied the minds of the bulk of the people of Paris, that large class of sober-minded clear-sighted men and women who generally arrive at the truth when they are not led away by popular agitators or sedition mongers. Most of them still felt a kindly interest in the poor young Queen, whom they had seen come amongst them as a happy and expectant bride, only to find a gaoler instead of a husband, and a cloister instead of a court.

And now perhaps that monastic prison had given place to the tomb, simply because she loved her lord too well to renounce those sacred rights which were hers in the sight of God and man.

Murmurs against the King and his advisers began to find utterance, and men said that if Madame Ingeburge could have shown herself she would soon have had an army to support her cause.

If she were not dead, then her place of concealment was very cleverly chosen, for there were many loving eyes looking for her. Eve, who had quite recovered from the shock of that terrible night, was exercising all her quick brain and womanly intuition to penetrate the darkness that enshrouded the fate of her beloved Angel. Eric had not thought of returning to work, indeed, he was not fit for it, for he had lost much blood from a flesh-wound he received in the fight, so he spent his days wandering about the city and its environs trying to glean some clue to the mystery. Then there was Albret, whose wound from the dagger of Mahmoud-el-Reis had by no means healed, still he was using every effort to further the search, and the King did not discourage it, though he had not taken any public part in the matter. Men said he was waiting till the final decision of the Council was given.

Not only had Madame Ingeburge disappeared, but the celebrated sculptor Jean Cador had never returned to the cathedral since he had been carried out in that deadlike

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swoon. Bishop Maurice de Sully was in great perplexity. The workshop was locked up and he did not like to force the door—the time in which the strange artist had promised to complete his work had elapsed, and he had neither produced the statue, nor come to explain his omission. The dumb negro servants had not been seen either, and Amaury Montruel the only man who had any knowledge of the true state of the work, kept silence for reasons of his own.

One night, as Albret was on his way to the King's apartments, he fancied he saw the sharply defined features of the Syrian in the shadow of a doorway. He darted forward to seize the intruder, but his hand only grasped the air, the figure had vanished like a phantom! The vast corridor was but dimly lighted by candelabra, which hung at intervals from the roof, and when he came to reflect upon the impossibility of Mahmoud-el-Reis having been able to evade the numerous guards, or scale the impregnable walls of the Louvre, which was more fortress than palace, he came to the conclusion that his over-excited brain had played him a trick, and that his mind had brought before him the picture of one of those whom he so eagerly sought.

The fable of Ingeburge's having been spirited away by the Evil One under the disguise of Jean Cador, had caused many an anxious moment to the more ignorant of her partizans. Her personal friends were so convinced of her purity and innocence, that the tale made no impression on them.

Four days had elapsed since the attack on the Abbey, and King Philip Augustus was in his private room that opened out of his sleeping apartment, in deep and affectionate converse with Agnes de Méranie. She was watching him with adoring eyes, and he bent over her with well-feigned tenderness.

"Alas! my dear lord," she was saying as she passed her fingers caressingly through his hair: "Why can I never feel my mind at rest? Why do I love you more and more every day, and yet this love, once the source of so much unalloyed delight, now only tortures me?"

Her eyes softened as she continued pathetically:

"The heart guesses the truth infallibly, and mine tells me, sometimes, that if I suffer, it is because my lord no longer loves me!"

Those who knew the passionate infatuation which the King had shown for Agnes de Méranie, and the empire that her subtle, seductive charms had wielded over him, might have thought to see them together, that the spell was still holding its magic sway.

He met her plaintive appeal with reproachful tenderness, and his eyes seemed still to find the same exquisite pleasure in her beauty. And she was looking her best. These daughters of the Tzeck race are bewitching in the soft subdued light of evening. Their somewhat striking features are toned down, their eyes shine more tenderly, their vigorous vitality yields to langorous grace, and their melodious voices fall harmoniously on the ear that is wearied with the day's excitement. Agnes de Méranie possessed all these charms and knew well how to use them. While the indomitable will and passionate pride of the woman gave fire to her glance, it was veiled by the softer love-light and the tender regrets to which she had given utterance.

"Foolish child!" murmured the King, pressing her hand to his lips. "You know your power over me!"

This answer by no means lulled her fears to rest, and, moreover, she noted with a shudder that his lips were

"My dearest lady, I have been fighting all day for the love of you."

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Standing underneath the lamp was a tall, dark man, wearing the turban and costly dress of a wealthy Saracen.

cold as ice. She looked past him to the burnished mirror which faithfully reflected her radiant beauty, but for once it gave her no satisfaction. What was the good of beauty if it could not keep the love she prized so dearly?

"I believe you, I believe you, my dear lord, for if I doubted you, it would kill me!" was her passionate reply.

He bent and kissed her hand a second time.

She was a consummate actress, but she well knew that in this, as in all else, the King was her superior, and therefore her misgivings were roused to the uttermost. She felt emboldened by the belief that Philip was in total ignorance of her visit to Cadocu at the tavern: but every now and then her heart would fail her as the fateful words rang in her ears—"The King knows *all*."

Perfect silence reigned about them. It was getting late, and they were secure from all interruption, so she braced herself for another effort to regain the ground she felt she had lost.

"Thank you, my dearest lord; you comfort and reassure me, because you pity your poor wife. But love is jealous, and quick to see signs of coldness. I have been banished from your side so much of late. Will you not let me stay with you now and lull you to rest with lute and song as in the happy days we have spent together?"

As he was preparing to answer her the clock struck eleven, and he rose abruptly, saying:

"My dearest lady, I have been fighting all day for the love of you. Not with my sword, but with tongue and brain. Not against men clad in armour, but against wily Churchmen, fenced in with text and dogma, and weaving subtle arguments that bewilder me. When I was fighting against the English I had time to enjoy your sweet society, but in this contest I must keep my brain cool and my nerve steady, so I dare not listen to your sweet songs."

This was her dismissal and she rose at once, hiding her chagrin under the semblance of dutiful submission.

"I must thank you again, my liege, for if you gain the victory, shall I not be the happiest woman in the world? But when will the Council cease their endless sittings?"

He had given her his hand and was leading her to the door.

"To-morrow, at this time, the Council of Bishops will hold their final deliberation, not in the palace, but in the choir of Nôtre Dame, which had the finishing touches put to the roof to-day. At the stroke of midnight Mass will be celebrated, and then the prelates will pronounce the name of the Queen!"

At these words, spoken in a tone of tender gallantry, he stooped and kissed her hand for the third time, and she felt, with a sense of exultation, that she might safely substitute her own name for that of the title she was so eager to wear.

She pressed his hand gratefully, and with another eloquent glance, passed out of the door.

Amaury Montruel, clad in full armour, was keeping his accustomed watch outside his royal master's room. He bowed his head respectfully as Madame Agnes swept by him, but she barely acknowledged his humble salutation.

"Good night, Amaury," said the King kindly.

"May God keep your majesty, and give you peaceful sleep!" was the fervent answer.

"Thank you," replied the King as he went in and shut the door, whereupon his faithful "Friend" lay down, still fully armed, across the threshold.

As soon as he was alone, Philip Augustus gave a deep sigh of utter weariness, and began talking to himself:

"Ingeburge was a King's daughter—she was beautiful, and she loved me!—but—there must be a demon in the heart of man—or else such women as——"

He broke off, and stepping cautiously to the door, shot two small bolts to secure himself on the inside, even while he was so ably guarded from without.

Then, smiling at his own precaution, he went towards his sleeping apartment. The royal couch was in a kind of a box, the sides and cover of which were beautifully carved outside and hung with rich curtains within. As was his wont the King called his page Albret, almost mechanically, for he

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knew that he had no need to raise his voice, as the youth was quick of hearing and always at his post.

Having called once, he thought no more about it, but went to draw back the curtains of his luxurious couch.

"Poor Ingeburge," he resumed meditatively, "what can have become of her? She would be just twenty-two now. She has suffered cruelly, I fear, and now—what if her happiness should come too late?"

His eyes fell on the silken coverlet, and just where it met the pillow he saw a glittering speck. Wondering how it got there, he put out his hand to pick up the stray gem, as he thought it, but scarcely had his fingers touched it, when he shrank back with a shudder, and uttered a low stifled cry.

The supposed gem was the point of a delicate crystal poniard, sharper than any steel and fine as a needle, bearing on the hilt an inscription in Arabic characters.

For the first time in his life Philip Augustus knew what the cold, clammy sweat of fear was!

Everyone in those days knew of the terrible and mysterious assassinations effected by the emissaries of the dreaded "Lord of the Mountain;" they knew the deadly significance of the crystal poniard, inscribed with a passage from the Koran, in the name of the Grand Master of the *Fédavi*.

Had the fortifications of the Louvre been assailed and taken? The walls razed? The garrison massacred or bribed? How else could the assassin have penetrated to the King's most private room? Popular credulity attributed supernatural powers to these Syrian fanatics, but Philip Augustus had no faith in such tales. He still held the deadly little weapon in his hand and was looking at it as if it fascinated him in spite of himself.

"Albret!" he called again, adding to himself, "Can *he* be the traitor?"

Most men would have felt crushed by this evidence of betrayal, and have cast their suspicions broadcast upon those around them; but his brain remained clear and his judgement just.

"No, no," he said, turning to the door where "The Friend of the King" was keeping guard, "it's not poor Albret. The traitor lies in that direction. But now that I've bolted the door, the assassin will find it difficult to follow his poniard to-night."

He heard a slight noise behind him, and, thinking it was the tardy page, he remarked without looking round:

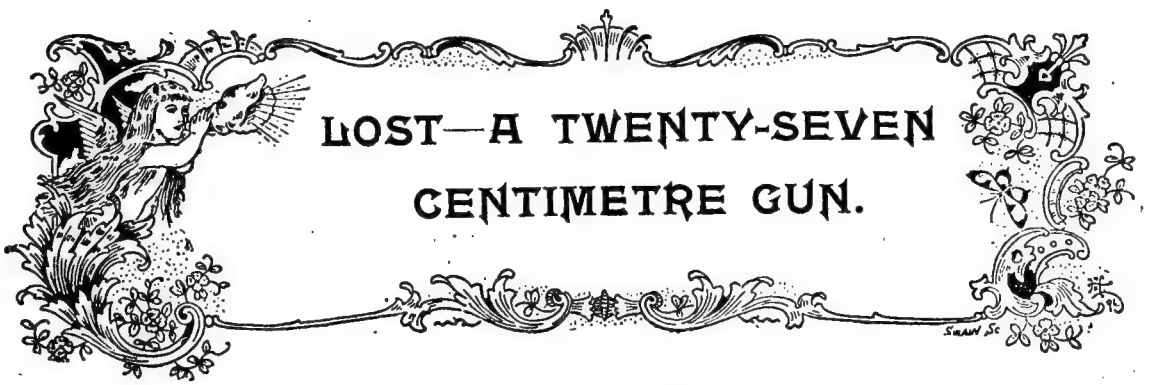
"You are very late to-night, my dear Albret!"

Then, as there was no reply, he turned, and saw a strange sight. Standing underneath the lamp was a tall, dark man, wearing the turban and costly dress of a wealthy Saracen!

Above his forehead there gleamed from the folds of his headdress an aigrette of rare gems, which scintillated in the light like fiery sparks, and from his girdle, which was interwoven with two ropes of pearls and emeralds, there hung a glittering scimitar.

The King stood aghast, believing himself to be the victim of some optical delusion, and the stranger neither moved nor spoke.

(To be continued.)



THERE was a great bustle and confusion on board the sloop-of-war *La Gaillarde*. *Dieu merci!* It was not occasioned by hostile preparation; on the contrary, the general commotion which prevailed was of the most pacific kind. *La Gaillarde* was to be unrigged, and from stern to stern, from the keel to the tallest topmast, every part of the brave ship was being inspected, registered, stamped, and ticketed with the most scrupulous care. It was no trifling affair, nor a mere formality, but a real methodical scrutiny.

During the past sixteen years that she had been lying off Alexandria *La Gaillarde* had already undergone several such trials. But all dismantlings are not alike, and a ship may be unrigged by order of the Government at least ten times, without even a single rat in her hold being disturbed in its habits. All the old provisions are kept on board, and the only change that takes place consists in the execution of sundry repairs, and in the renewal of certain details.

Such was the fate of the corvette *La Gaillarde*. She had been administratively inspected five or six times, but finally strict orders had arrived from the Admiralty for the ship to be completely unrigged while at station in the harbour of Toulon. Therefore the army of rats occupying the hull were in a state of terrible disturbance.

For two days every nook and corner had been ransacked, turned topsy-turvy, and old Quartermaster Lehnblot, who was only too glad to seize the opportunity to revenge the loss of divers pairs of trousers and three or four pairs of shoes, untimely victims to the rapacious quadrupeds, had made a perfect hetacomb of these trespassers upon his private property.

Ah, how merrily the rats had spent their time all these long years, living peacefully and growing fat in

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perpetual ease and security. How many jackets, caps, crackers, and dried vegetables had been nibbled and devoured in secret? But even a rat's felicity must come to an end.

Lehnblot, his hands plunged in the depths of his pockets, and his mouth puckered up in a whistle, stood in a passage-way, looking down upon the slaughtered enemies bleeding at his feet. He was congratulating himself upon his victory over at least this number of the abhorred creatures, who could now torment him no longer. He was sunk in deep reflection, when he heard the lieutenant hailing him from the upper deck. In an instant Lehnblot, twirling his cap between his bony fingers, appeared in the presence of the commander, the purser, the lieutenant, and midshipman, all of whom had just been exploring the vessel together.

"Lehnblot," asked the commander, "how many guns are there on board?"

"Four, sir," answered the quartermaster, astounded at such a question.

"Were there never more than four? You ought to know, as you have been on board longer than anybody else."

"I believe, sir, that I heard the former lieutenant say that there used to be five guns, but I never saw more than four."

"Well," said the commander, "you hear that, purser; there is most likely a mistake in the registers. It is very strange, however, that your predecessors did not verify it, and much to be regretted that you never discovered this error yourself. The case must be made clear. I may rely upon you, may I not?"

"Never fear, sir, I will make a thorough search."

The inspection ended, Purser Lacarlingue went immediately to his cabin, where he commenced thumbing and turning over all the registers, account books, documents, and papers that he could lay his hands upon, but after four hours of hard work he had found nothing.

"Hang the gun. To-morrow morning all the ships papers must be sent in right trim to the Admiralty under hand and seal of the commander. What is to be done?"

That night Purser Lacarlingue dined most uncomfortably. After leaving the table, he sent for Lehnblot.

"You know all about the ship's accounts," he said to the quartermaster, "come and help me to go over them again, we *must* find that gun," and both men with the same earnestness made another useless search through all the papers.

"'Pon my soul," exclaimed the purser, striking his fist upon the table, "that beats everything I ever heard of! A twenty-seven centimetre gun disappeared without leaving any trace! A cask of rum, or a box of biscuits can be lost, but not a ship's gun!"

"But not a ship's gun!" echoed Lehnblot. "*Mon Dieu!* A cannon can't be prigged like a quid of tobacco!"

"*Allons, mon vieux*, let's hunt for it once more," said the disconsolate purser.

Dawn, commencing to glimmer over the blue waters of the Mediterranean, found the two officers still searching desperately but in vain. One gun out of five was yet missing.

"One of the documents must be lost," murmured the wretched purser dolefully.

"Perhaps it has been eaten up by the rats. The cursed beasts are capable of anything," replied Lehnblot.

"Maybe you are right," said poor Lacarlingue, turning over nervously the pages of his report, and casting a melancholy glance at the numerous misdeeds attributed therein to Lehnblot's bitter foes. For a few moments he remained absorbed in thought, then, bounding to his feet, he courageously seized his pen and wrote in a steady hand a few lines upon a sheet of paper, which he presented to Lehnblot.

"What do you say to that, old fellow?" he shouted in triumphant tones.

The quartermaster read the words; turned the paper upside down, and opened his eyes and mouth wide in amazement.

"Do—do you believe that will go—go down?" he stammered.

"No doubt of it. The commander will have no time to read the document; he will sign it, and once in the office, nobody will think anything more about the concern."

Two hours later, a gig left the sloop's side, transporting to the shore the report relative to the inventory of *La Gaillarde*.

"Is it all right?" the commander had simply asked before sealing the document.

"Yes, sir."

"And how about that lost gun?"

"I found out the mistake," answered Lacarlingue, rubbing his hands together in great satisfaction that the vexatious affair was ended at last.

But the purser's conscience was probably not quite at ease. If you had met him on the quay of Toulon a few weeks afterwards, you would certainly have noticed that he looked troubled, as though some serious preoccupation was weighing heavily upon his mind, and his anxiety seemed to increase whenever he was called to the officers to transact any business for the ship.

One morning, as he was passing through a hall at the "Bureau de l'Amirâtué," he met one of his friends, a head clerk, who rushed up to him, saying: "You have come in the nick of time, Lacarlingue; the inventory report of *La Gaillarde* has just been sent back to us from the minister's office."

"Have you opened it?" inquired Lacarlingue, breathless with emotion.

"Why, no, I haven't."

"May I see the document?"

"Nothing so easy, *cher ami*; come, it is here in my office."

Purser Lacarlingue followed his friend; a cold shiver ran through his whole frame when he began turning the pages of that too well-known report. Suddenly he drew a sigh of relief—so deep, so profound, that two underclerks, perched upon their high stools, startled at the noise, turned sharply round, wondering how a whale had ever been able to get into the office.

This is what Lacarlingue had read in the report: First, the following lines in his own handwriting, under the head of "Losses and Damages":

LOST STORES.

NATURE OF OBJECT.	NUMBER.	DATE OF LOSS.	CAUSE OF LOSS.
Twenty-seven centimetre gun.	1	Unknown.	Eaten up by the rats.

and opposite in the column of "Observations," these words, traced by an all-powerful hand:

Approved for the rarity of the fact.
First Lord of Admiralty,
DU HAUBAN.

MARY E. PLUMMER.

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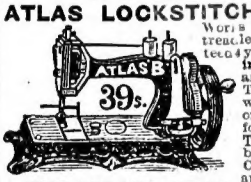

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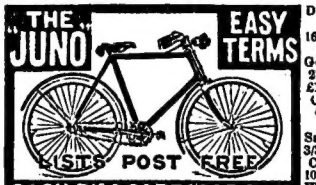

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I'VE FOUND IT AT LAST,

A. L. would like to know what is the meaning of the term "brass-plate coal merchants," which he saw in an old book.———It was a term used in the trade to denote the middlemen who acted as agents on commission. In the course of a Parliamentary inquiry into the coal trade it was shown that five-sixths of the London public were supplied by these middlemen.

B.—British possessions in Africa extend over an area of two and a half millions of square miles—almost equal to the area of the United States.

PAPER.—Tissue paper was originally made to place between tissue cloth of gold or silver, to prevent fraying when folded.

B. I.—It is estimated that there are 51,000 breweries in the world, and considerably more than one-third of them are in Germany.

MITE.—St. Swithin was the Bishop of Winchester and tutor of King Alfred. His wish was to be buried in the open air, but the monks, on the contrary, desired that it should be in the chancel of the cathedral. The tradition is that the saint sent a heavy rain on the 15th of July, the day appointed for the ceremony, which occasioned its postponement from day to day for forty days. Tired out with waiting they buried him in the churchyard.

COINS.—Twice during the last century a mistake was made in the spelling of the Latinised form of the King's name on our halfpence. In 1730 the name was given as "Geogius," instead of Georgius, and in 1772 some half-pennies left the Mint with the name "Georius." On the latter occasion a reward was offered for each piece returned to the Mint.

ROYAL.—In the way of palaces, the imperial family of Japan leads easily. There are thirty palaces belonging to them in different parts of Japan, but the present Emperor has occupied only three or four, and has never even seen some of them. The quality of several may be described as "doubtful."

PENAL.—The Belgian convict receives payment from the authorities, just as his British companion in crime. Three-tenths of his earnings are given to him when his term of imprisonment has expired.

T. LANG.—It is a strange fact that injuries to the tongue, whether of man or animal, heal more quickly than those of any other part of the body. This is probably because it is kept warm, free from dirt, and continually moistened.

METER.—If you mark a circle one inch in diameter on an Ordnance map of the inch scale, the area contained within that circle will be as near as possible 500 acres. That will probably serve your purpose.

TIME.—Yes, that was the record year in point of length. It is now called "46 B.C." and "the year of confusion," and it had 445 days. The year, as previously arranged, had not been of the proper length, and the calendar and the seasons had got mixed up. Julius Cæsar rearranged the length of the year, and added a number of days to the one in progress in order to bring the months into conformity with the seasons.

H. T. H. asks: "Which people may claim the distinction of being physically the finest in Europe?" ———From an "all-round" point of view, the gipsies of Hungary. They are splendid specimens of humanity, and they are rarely ill. Their wounds heal with surprising quickness and usually without the application of medicaments, thus testifying to the purity of their blood.

L. A.—The word "ax" or "axe" for "ask," which is common in some parts of the kingdom, is really an old Saxon word. You will find it in Chaucer and Wycliffe, and in a letter addressed to Henry VII. by his mother, as well as in other writings.

PLAY.—In proportion to its population, Italy has more theatres than any other country in the world.

R. T.—Yes, the annual fair at Nijni-Novgorod is being modernised, like most other things. It used to be the most primitive in Europe—an exhibition of Orientalism in people, manners, and products; but it is now merely an exhibition to exploit the latest productions of Russia.

NATURALIST.—If you wish to make the experiment of taming a trapped rat, there is no valid reason why you should not do so. Try the plan of making the creature drink all the water it needs from a spoon, which you can insert into the trap through a specially made and narrow opening, holding the spoon by the handle. This plan is frequently successful.

U. S.—The length of the coast line of the United States is 5,715 miles. This is made up of 2,349 miles on the Atlantic ocean, 1,556 on the Gulf of Mexico, and 1,810 on the Pacific ocean.

NEXT week a collecting-sheet will be inclosed with every copy of *Short Stories*, and I shall be greatly obliged if my readers will see they get it.

W. R.—The entire population of England at the time of the Conqueror did not exceed 2,000,000.

PENMAN.—Reed pens, split at the ends like quill pens, have been found in Egyptian tombs, and probably date back to 2,500 years before the Christian Era.

MEDALLIST.—You are probably referring to the "Indian Chief" medal, an interesting military decoration of the period of George III., which was issued to Indian chiefs during the American War. On the reverse is a representation of the American wolf snarling at the British lion at a respectful distance.

G. H. K.—No, there is not a solitary peer in the House of Lords who was there at the time of the Queen's accession to the throne.

CURIOUS.—The Grand Opera House in Paris is the largest building of the kind in the world. It covers more than three acres of ground, and cost a quarter of a million sterling.

W. R.—The percentage of illiterates in this country is 7. When the Queen came to the throne, 40 per cent. of the people could not write their names.

S. D. has read that there are more than two thousand millionaires in Berlin and emphatically expresses the opinion that the statement is false.———The statement is not improbable. You forget that the Germans do not reckon in pounds, but in marks, a mark being roughly equal to a shilling. A Frenchman is a millionaire if he has a million francs (£40,000).

NAT asks if I know whether a monument has ever been erected to the joint memory of the commanders of opposing forces.———Yes, there is a famous monument of that kind in Canada. On the Plains of Abraham there is a memorial to Wolf and Montcalme, who both fell at the taking of Quebec.

T. B. G.—The longest paved street in the world is Washington Street, Boston, which is seventeen and a half miles long.

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